

# Incoming Macedonian government pledges subservience to Western powers

Tania Kent, Paul Stuart  
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On September 16, the President of Macedonia, Ljubco Georgijevski of Vmro-Dpmne, was voted out of office in a shock election result.

Amidst the wrangle over the structure of a new coalition, the population is demanding a government that will tackle the escalating economic crisis.

The election was called as part of the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement signed August 13, 2001 by the outgoing Macedonian government and the Albanian National Liberation Army, which ended the six-month insurgency of Albanian separatists that had resulted in the internal displacement of 100,000 people.

Georgijevski will be replaced by the head of the Social Democratic Alliance, Branko Crvenkovski, the main party in the "Together for Macedonia" coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party and the Workers and Farmers Party. With 60 seats out of 120, more than double that of any other single party, they are expected to establish a coalition with the newly formed Albanian separatist Union for Democratic Initiative (DUI). Agreement has been reached on its principles for full governmental "transparency" demanded by United States and European Union officials. According to early reports, Crvenkovski will offer the DUI the ministries of justice, local self-government, labour and social welfare.

The DUI was formed three months ago by the Nationalist Liberation Army headed by Ali Ahmeti. He launched terror attacks against Macedonian targets between spring and summer last year. Ahmeti had been indicted by the outgoing government for the alleged murder of 100 Macedonians. The DUI, winning 30 seats, eclipsed the established Albanian party, the Democratic Party for Albanians, the coalition partner of Georgijevski, whose vote collapsed from 11 seats to two.

The election campaign was characterised by violence and interference from international institutions. Six people were killed in the run up to polling day and several shootings took place at polling booths. Planned rallies in the capital Skopje by the main parties were banned on the grounds of forestalling violence. The situation threatened to escalate when DUI spokesperson, Agron Buxhaku, in a press conference declared, "We will continue with the congregations, and so far we have tolerated enough in order not to complicate the situation. But

from now on those who will stop DUI pre-election campaigns will be responsible for any escalations of the situation in the country."

NATO had troops in Kosova and helicopters on the border on standby alert, and some 3,500 specially trained police officers were deployed. The *Christian Science Monitor* observed, "Indeed, intimidation was so pervasive that, despite the country's population of only two million, the international community mobilised the largest international monitoring effort ever."

The American think tank, the International Crisis Group (ICG), staffed by former US military and judicial figures, has a history of formulating pseudo-environmental or humanitarian justifications for imperialist policies in the Balkans. The ICG released a report, "Macedonia's Public Secret: How the corruption drags the country down," the day before the election campaign which began by saying that corruption in the country was widespread, especially at the "top of the government".

The report used the privatisation of OKTA, the only Macedonian oil refinery, as a major case in point. The refinery was sold in 1999 to Greek Hellenic Petroleum for only \$32 million, which was not its market value. OKTA was sold based on direct negotiations with the Greek company. World Bank director James Wolfenson also reacted to this "non-transparent" sale and said that the functioning of the government should be more accessible to the public if it wanted to make any financial arrangements with the World Bank.

The ruling party interpreted the publication of the report as an attempt to topple the government. An outgoing government spokesman accused the ICG representative in Macedonia, Edward Joseph, of working in favour of the opposition coalition and having close ties with Ahmeti.

Seventy percent of the population turned out to vote in the hope of changing the disastrous course of the outgoing government. A November 5 article from last year's *Aimpress* noted, "hardly anyone in Macedonia pays any attention to the almost tragic erosion of the economy, widespread poverty of almost one half of the population, daily street protests and road blockades of dissatisfied workers. The economists say that the worst is yet to come unless the promised economic assistance arrives, which is conditioned by the realisation of the

Framework Agreement [Ohrid].”

In a pre-election special, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a Washington-based think tank, described “widespread frustration within the Macedonian electorate regarding the responsiveness of the current government to its economic and social needs.”

Both Crvenkovski and Ahmeti made partial attempts to direct their public policies and election agitation to these growing demands. Both parties made promises of tackling almost 40 percent unemployment and average monthly salaries below \$200, with work programmes designed to create 150,000 jobs. But the possible leaders of the new coalition government have already been told by leading financial institutions that assistance will be made conditional on implementing aggressive privatisation policies and the full implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.

The Ohrid Agreement includes provision for increasing ethnic Albanian representation in the police force from 5 percent to 25 percent, the use of Albanian as a second language in official communications, government institutions for minorities constituting 20 percent of the population and devolution of power to local government. Most of its statutes have been implemented under threats of financial sanctions.

The DUI is the only party that fully supports the Ohrid Agreement. At a pre-election meeting, candidate Abdylhaqim Ademi said, “DUI is a new party, but with high national values, a party that knows how to lead the population, in its political activity, also in its military aspect, which we proved last year.” He added that the DUI’s support “is an obstacle to those... who cooperate with and who think of Bulgaria, Ukraine and Russia.” Fazli Veliu, member of DUI Central Committee, explained the party’s pro-Western policies: “DUI doesn’t have a local program, nor a Balkan one, but a European and American one, which is based on the integrated economy, in the economy of construction and the civilised nation.”

After the elections the first international delegation to arrive in Macedonia was led by the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Erhard Busek. The priority for future cooperation, he pointed out, was the signing of free trade agreements in the region. He reiterated the main goals of the stability pact, integration of South Eastern Europe countries into the EU. A new government, he insisted, must adopt laws to stimulate foreign investments, complete the privatisation process in industry and agriculture. He announced that the next meeting of the pact is to be held on December 11 in Skopje.

A second delegation came from the US Department of State and Defence, led by Ambassador Nicholas Burns, permanent US envoy to NATO, and immediately entered discussions with Crvenkovski and others on the makeup of the coalition. US Ambassador to Macedonia, Lawrence Butler, who attended the meeting, declared his satisfaction at the election results.

Despite the fact that DUI leader is still on President Bush’s

terrorist blacklist and US companies remain forbidden to engage in any financial transactions with him, Butler said of Ali Ahmeti: “After the signing of the Framework Agreement [Ohrid] he got involved in the democratic process in Macedonia. The Albanian voters have elected him and his party as their representatives in the Parliament. The situation from last week’s parliamentary session, when the former opponents sat together in order to accomplish the political goals in democratic and peaceful manner is something we have not seen before on the Balkans. It makes Macedonia unique in the region.”

The US turned against the outgoing coalition when it became obvious they had no support in the country. The Western powers have been working for some time, both overtly and covertly, to bring to power a more compliant regime that would integrate the NLA, which a plethora of evidence suggests was secretly backed by Washington, into government structures. Although Giorgijevski had implemented most of the Ohrid Agreement, he had to be pushed all the way and continued to attack NATO involvement in last year’s NLA insurgency.

In a pre-election rally Giorgijevski reiterated, “We can’t accept bloody screenplays and kidnappings. We have to say that last year we didn’t fight only against mountain gangs. We fought against the whole infrastructure of Kosovo Protection Forces, paid and sponsored by the United Nations, fought against many NATO generals, who publicly supported the terrorists in Macedonia, went in their camps and gave them arms and satellite communication systems and equipment... orders for massacres were given not only by the commanders of the Albanian terrorist, but also by Peter Fate, James Pardew and other ambassadors, who all over the world speak about the democracy and against the terrorism.”

The new coalition will not bring stability to Macedonia. It has come to power partially as a result of efforts by the US to stoke up the type of ethnic conflicts that have torn apart the Balkans. Moreover, it benefited from a wave of disaffection with the social and economic policies of the Georgijevski coalition, but is charged with implementing the demands of the US and the EU more forcefully than its predecessor. The restructuring of its economy will necessitate the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs and the dismantling of welfare protection, thus setting the government on a collision course with the working class.



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