

Why did the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM) lose the national elections in 2006, 2008 and 2011, and the local elections in 2013?



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Abstract

The defeat at the following elections in 2006, 2008 and 2011 was due to so-called “burning feelings of injustice” and increased Macedonian nationalism after the armed conflict with the Albanian guerrillas in 2001 and after the threatening exertion of pressure by Greece in the so-called name dispute. The citizens, above all the ethnic Macedonians, felt insulted, and even unsafe. Thus the so-called “burning feeling of injustice” is a constant source for the mobilization and manipulation of the public for election purposes. As long as the feeling of fear and threat exists, the citizens will vote for a party and a leader who present themselves as unyielding saviours in the face of pressures. And this goes along with an authoritarian style of governing, since every “non-patriot” should be removed.

Key words: Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), political parties, elections, nationalism

Introduction

Teaching courses in politics to my students, I have noticed that one of the topics that arouses their greatest interest is that of political parties. Little wonder, perhaps, since modern politics is founded on the organization and functioning of political parties. And besides, we in Macedonia live in a highly politicized society where all eyes are turned towards the state as the source of the greatest political and economic power and privileges. By way of illustration, when I told my students that the most common way of entering the political scene was to join a political party, they misunderstood me to mean that in order to get a good job in the state administration they would have to become members of the governing party! Yet supporting or joining a political party should mean much more: it means not only taking a side regarding certain important political issues but undertaking responsibility for this choice.

Another topic my students have found interesting is the question of why a person should become a member of one political party instead of another. What is it that makes people become social democrats, Christian democrats, liberals or supporters of extremist factions? How much are people's party-political choices influenced by their beliefs and values, their socio-economic status, age and tradition? There are various theories that offer interesting and relevant answers to these questions, but ultimately it seems that in politics the most important thing, after all, is conviction. Here we should emphasize the distinction made by Minogue that it would be a mistake to identify conviction with ideology (Minogue 1995: 71). Although it is important to analyse party ideology, Minogue acknowledges, since ideology serves as a guide to how politics historically develops and changes, it is convictions that show the importance and influence of the concrete circumstances in which political parties operate. This is clear when one considers that a party may strictly adhere to its party ideology despite the fact that this will lead in some circumstances to a loss of voters.

Turning to psychology, the branch of political science which analyses electoral behaviour, an interesting insight is offered by Andrew Heywood, who argues that voter behaviour is clearly shaped by short-term and long-term influences. Amongst the strongest short-term influences, he lists the economy, the character and public position of party leaders, as well as the influence of the media. Long-term influences, meanwhile, are connected to the model of

party identification, the model of rational choice, or the model of dominant ideology. In the party-identification model, people's voting habits are determined by their identification with a particular party which, as long-term supporters, they regard as 'their' party. In the sociological model, it is people's social background that determines political orientation either towards the Left or towards the Right; put more simply, according to this model the poor will vote for the Left while the rich will vote for the Right. The model of rational choice, on the other hand, focuses attention on individuals, treating voters as though they were 'rational' beings making rational choices regardless of their social background, which is far from the truth (Heywood 2009: 283). To what extent, if any, can these theoretical models be applied in the analysis of the election results of political parties in Macedonia, especially the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), in a social context in which every third citizen is unemployed and poor? How has it happened that the doctrine of socialism, which calls for egalitarian and redistributive reforms whenever possible, has lost its attraction for voters at the very moment when the latest data from the World Bank confirm the rapidly growing divisions along social lines in Macedonian society—when 10% of the richest people in Macedonia have incomes almost 17 times greater than the same percentage of the poorest citizens, when 20 per cent of the richest population have as much as 49% of the country's total revenues at their disposal, while only 4.9% of these revenues go to the poorest 20%? It seems from these statistics that the division along social lines in Macedonia is greater even than social divisions in Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro or Romania. This is confirmed by the Gini index of dispersion published by the World Bank which measures a nation's income distribution from 0 to 100, with 0 meaning equal dispersion and 100 showing maximal inequality (i.e. all revenues go to the rich). In 1998 Macedonia had a Gini index of 28.1. Ten years later, in 2008, the index was 44.2, while the latest data show this index is 43.9. For many sociologists, this inequality is understood to be a result of a "wild" market economy and a high level of corruption. "In our country, such a dispersion is the result of the 20-year-long transition and the irresponsibility of the political elites," says sociologist Ilija Acevski.¹

Before embarking on a concrete analysis of the possible factors that have contributed to the election defeats of SDSM, it is important to point out two contradictions encountered in such an analysis. The first of these contradictions concerns the social democratic ideology itself. The

addition *democracy* in social democratic ideology only signifies, as Minogue says, that social democrats recognize the state as an institution that needs to respond to the existing needs and demands of its citizens, and that any concept of a 'perfect' state is not in accordance with the nature of politics (Minogue 1995: 82). This effectively implies that the ideal of social justice and a just redistribution of wealth is an ideal that is difficult to achieve, which undermines the position of social democrats. The second contradiction refers to the growing dissatisfaction of the public with political parties and party leaders—a dissatisfaction which, as Linz points out, is a universal phenomenon (Linz 2009: 366). This phenomenon of blaming political parties and their leaders for all the troubles of the citizens is evident in our society, as seen in many public opinion surveys. The problem lies in the consequences of such an attitude. Namely, if political parties are seen as inefficient then it follows, if not explicitly then implicitly, that parties should be abolished. Abolishing political parties, however, may lead to populism and even autocratic rule. In a representative democracy, sovereignty lies with the citizens, and at elections they transfer that sovereignty to representatives whom they cannot control afterwards. The example that Linz gives of certain events in Latin America, where dissatisfaction results in above-party or anti-party rule, has similarities with the character of the rightist regime in Macedonia. The parliamentary opposition and the free media are treated as unnecessary democratic ornaments that merely hamper the efficiency of the Government since in certain cases the Government will have to reach agreements with the Opposition. Typical of leaders of populist regimes, the leader of the Macedonian governing party shows a tendency of circumventing institutions, convinced that he is working in the interest of the public and that his motives are highly moral.

Methodologically speaking, the success of party policy in most cases cannot be judged by a party's written manifesto. A realistic evaluation of policy requires observation over time. Statements by politicians about the success or failure of a political party, especially while that party was in power, are a legitimate methodological source. Taking into consideration this theoretical knowledge and methodological principles, we shall attempt to answer the question as to why SDSM has lost the support of the electorate over the last seven years.

The heavy historical legacy

In the 1990s, SDSM did not distance itself from orthodox Leninist ideology and did not reaffirm the liberal wing in the party. Anyone familiar with the history of the Alliance of the Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) will be aware that there were many factional conflicts between the orthodox communists and the ‘reformers’, i.e. ‘liberals’. The first large-scale factional conflict took place in the mid-1960s between the orthodox communists, who defended the idea of socialism as a society with a centralized state and a planned economy, and the ‘reformers’ who were in favour of introducing certain market measures and forms of private property. This conflict was accompanied by painful dismissals of people from their jobs, contrary to the ideology of equality and full employment. One of the most prominent leaders of the reform faction was Kiro Gligorov, who was elected President of Macedonia three decades later with the help and support of this faction in the Alliance of Communists of Macedonia (SKM). The next large-scale conflict took place in the 1970s, between the orthodox communists and the so-called liberals. The ‘liberals’ were in favour of greater democratization in both the party and in society, including the introduction of some form of limited political pluralism, broader participation in economic and political decision-making, and measures against corruption in the party and society. With regard to the organization of SKJ and SKM, the idea was to “soften” the centralism in the party, i.e. the authoritarian manner of decision-making, and to introduce more democratic forms of participation for party-members in decision-making and in the election of the leadership. The ‘liberals’ went furthest in calling for greater independence for the republics that composed the Yugoslav federation. Their greatest “sin” was that they demanded the introduction of a principle of consensus among the republics in the decision-making process in SKJ and SKM. This initiated a spiral of fear among party members that these demands could bring about the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation, as indeed eventually happened. A counter-strike by Tito and the “old orthodox guard” followed. A “purge” began, in which all SKM members who had directly participated in the factional conflict as supporters of the ‘liberals’, as well as intellectuals who adopted ideas of liberalism and political freedom, were removed from political life and leadership positions. The recruitment of the leadership in the state and party structures was undertaken, above all, according to the principle of “compatibility”. This essentially meant

arbitrary evaluation of people by the police-party structures, often based on personal hostilities, envy, anonymous calls and insinuations. The centralism of the decision-making process strengthened to such an extent that, when the democratic wave spread throughout Eastern Europe in the 1990s, Macedonia found itself in an absurd situation. Politicians who were not real democrats at all, with few exceptions, now became promoters of democratic changes. Some of them adapted quickly to the new situation and re-surfaced in the “first lines”, again taking hold of the privileged party and state functions. In the nineties, the Alliance of Communists of Macedonia changed its name to the Communist Alliance – Party for Democratic Changes, later into SDSM, but it retained the old leadership style and the already screened party cadres. The ‘liberals’ were never publicly rehabilitated, nor was anyone concerned to affirm this liberal legacy in SDSM. How could it be different? The general oblivion was helped by the political appearance of the nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE, which used frightening rhetoric against the representatives of the old system. The announced democratic changes in SDSM were put off for some better time ahead. The party leadership was concentrated even more in the hands of its long-time leader, which is obvious from the way in which he was elected president of the party – with acclamation. This situation later turned into a comfortable habit. Put briefly, the atmosphere of fear and threat in the early nineties postponed the democratic reforms in the party and the rehabilitation of the liberal fraction. There was simply no internal need or pressure for such reform. SDSM adopted the safe position of uncritically defending the repressive aspects of the previous one-party system, and the old leading cadre was sustained right up until the transfer of political power in 1998. The unclear position of SDSM toward lustration, for example, is a good indicator of their defensive form of politics.

Criminal privatisation and corruption as a rupturing factor

From 1990 to 1998, the Communist Alliance – Party for Democratic Changes (SKM-PDP) consolidated its power and changed its name to the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM). Although its coalition partner in government was the so-called Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP)—a party representing ethnic Albanians (who make up around 25%

of the population), there were no serious discussions of possible power-sharing. The reasons for this unwillingness to share power were multiple: the ongoing civil war in Yugoslavia; the country's subjection to various blockades and embargoes; fear of the dissolution of Macedonia; the dispute with Greece about the 'name issue'; anti-Albanian feelings (generated, above all, by the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE), and the ideal of building Macedonia as a nation-state. The concentration of power in the hands of one political party (SDSM), however, produced most of all a lack of willingness to engage in any political dialogue or compromise, harming the position of its coalition partner, the PDP. The former president of this party, Abdurahman Aliti, many times officially declared "I couldn't give anything meaningful to my voters". His party lost the next elections, and a new and more radical Albanian party appeared on the political scene: the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). The economic situation in the country was very difficult because of the two embargos imposed by Greece and the UN embargo imposed on Serbia. The unemployment rate was over 30% and a number of financial scandals (e.g. the TAT pyramid scheme collapse) traced to senior leaders of the governing party, SDSM, shocked the public. The officials of the ruling party were accused of criminal privatization, of violating the UN embargo, smuggling tobacco and various other forms of corruption. The Albanian coalition partner PDP was not totally innocent, having access to the profits arising from subverting the sanctions. The transformation of state property into private property by the Social Democratic Alliance (SDSM), which is contrary to its ideology, and especially the criminal manner of privatisation, contributed greatly to the party's loss of members and voters. After all, SDSM is a party that is supposed to protect the interests of the workers and the middle class.

Convinced it would lose the elections, SDSM proposed a change in the electoral model from majoritarian to semi-proportional, hoping for better electoral results. The smaller parties of Turks, Roma, Serbs and Bosniaks also exerted pressure in the direction of greater proportionality, thus proving Lijphart's theses that ethnic divisions influence the choice of institutional solutions (Lijphart 1992). As a result of the adoption of the new model, the number of political parties increased slightly from 19 in the first round in 1990 to 23 in 1998. Because SDSM did actually lose the elections in 1998, power was transferred to VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition partner, the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). The social democrats in the country

thus paid the price for their corrupt politicians, criminal privatisation and the concentration of power in the hands of a small group clustered around the party's leader.

The armed conflict of 2001 and the Ohrid Framework Agreement

Most concepts of democracy are based on the principle of 'government by the people'. From 1991, when the Constitution of Macedonia was adopted, to 2001, almost no one, including the Social Democratic Party, questioned that "the people" meant primarily "the majority", meaning the ethnic Macedonians who composed 64.2% of the population, as opposed to the Albanians, Turks, Roma, Vlachs, Serbs and Bosniaks who made up 25.2% of the population. Political representatives and many in academic circles strongly favoured majoritarianism, based on the principle of political equality as one of the core principles of democracy. Their argument in the debate was that each individual member carries the same weight and all voices are equally loud. This is often summed up as the principle of "one person, one vote". And it is thanks to this principle that the minorities in the country were excluded from the instruments of power. However, this ideal of 'one person, one vote' was questioned by the political party of the Albanians (PDPA/NDP) from the beginning of the independence of the country. Thus the Constitution was actually adopted in 1991 without the votes of Albanian MPs because most of their demands were rejected. Twenty-three representatives of the Albanian political party (out of 120 MPs) did not vote, although they had actively participated in parliamentary procedures. Inter-ethnic tensions in the country mounted in future years, and on 9 July 1997 the police clashed with Albanian protesters in the town of Gostivar. The trigger for this clash was the raising of the Albanian flag in front of the municipality building, which was against the law. Three people were killed and others wounded. That was a painful lesson for the whole society, though it is difficult to believe that this lesson was learnt by the political parties, including SDSM. The intellectuals who were close to SDSM at that time, like Professor Ljubomir Frčkoski and Professor Gjorge Ivanov (today's President of the Republic), fiercely defended the rule of the majority. They refused any idea of possible power-sharing between political representatives of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in the country until the tension exploded. The

situation changed dramatically after the armed conflict in 2001 between the central government in Skopje and Albanian guerrillas of the Albanian National Liberation Army (ONA, or UÇK). At that time, Ljubco Georgievski, then leader of the nationalistic VMRO-DPMNE, was Prime Minister (having gained this position after the election in 1998). Georgievski's coalition partner was the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), but the government was in danger of splitting along ethnic lines, as was Macedonian society. As the conflict escalated, the EU and the USA took serious diplomatic action to prevent the looming civil war. Diplomats from the EU and the USA succeeded in persuading all relevant parliamentary parties in the country that only a "broad coalition government" would be able to achieve the peace accord. After several months of fighting, the Framework Agreement was signed in Ohrid on 13 August 2001.

Normal life was gradually restored and the next parliamentary elections were held in 2002. The former guerrilla fighters transformed their army into a political party, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), and then took part in the electoral run. SDSM led a coalition of several smaller parties called 'Together for Macedonia' and won the elections. The coalition won 60 parliamentary seats out of 120 (with 41.4% of the popular vote) while VMRO-DPMNE and its partner, the Liberal Party, won 33 seats (with 25.0%). The Democrat Union for Integration (DUI) won 16 seats with 12.1% of the popular vote, while DPA won 7 seats with 5.3% of the popular vote. Thus the citizens of the country punished the previous coalition government of VMRO-DPMNE and the DPA because it wasn't able to deal efficiently with the Albanian insurgence and had brought the country to the edge of civil war. But the decisions that SDSM had to make in its four-year mandate were highly unpopular, especially among ethnic Macedonians, who did not easily forget that their Albanian co-citizens had used weapons against them. These unpopular measures included forming a government together with recent enemies and changing the national character of the state into a consociational model of "power-sharing" as an obligation arising from the Peace Agreement (the Ohrid Framework Agreement), and handing over to its Albanian coalition partner, DUI, some municipalities in Western Macedonia, such as Struga and Kičevo, which had traditionally been under the authority of ethnic Macedonians. All these necessary measures were perceived as unjust by the majority of ethnic Macedonians. The party (SDSM) that had set out to undertake unpopular solutions for the sake of the peace and stability of the country then lost the elections held in 2006. At this election, the

VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition won 45 seats (12 more than at the previous elections), while the SDSM-led coalition won 32 seats (29 seats less than at the previous elections). Among the voters, 32.51% voted for the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, while the SDSM-led coalition won 23.31% of the popular vote. That was a real disaster for SDSM and its coalition parties. Nevertheless, the country stabilised after having gone to the brink of civil war. The nationalists from VMRO-DPMNE, exploiting the “burning feeling of injustice” (Guelke 2012) among ethnic Macedonians, returned victoriously to power. It should be stressed that a genuine fear of Albanian separatism existed among ethnic Macedonians and that this fear was indeed very strong in 2001. However, this genuine fear escalated into the so-called “burning feeling of injustice” through the immoderate words and deeds of the Macedonian nationalists and their effective party propaganda (Guelke 2012).

The nationalist treatment of the Macedonian-Greek dispute about the country’s name may serve as another highly illustrative example of misusing the people’s alleged “burning feeling of injustice” to gain popular votes.

Nationalism: the safest way to win elections

In 2008, early elections were held as a result of a political crisis provoked by the strong pressure exerted on Macedonia through Greece’s insistence that the country should change its name, *erga omnes*, as a precondition for its membership in NATO and the EU. The Bucharest Summit of 2008, at which Greece vetoed Macedonia’s acceptance into NATO, was only the peak of Greece’s protracted demonstration of power. The veto directly affected the political stability of Macedonia. The opposition party SDSM accused the government of destroying the European future of the country, while the government accused the opposition of treason because of its readiness to compromise with Greece. These fierce mutual accusations created an atmosphere throughout the whole society of searching for culprits, with the result that early elections were called. The opposition party, the leftist SDSM, lost these early elections. The citizens of Macedonia responded to the Bucharest veto by giving massive support to the position taken by the rightist-centrist party VMRO-DPMNE and its leader Nikola Gruevski, of not yielding to

Greece's demands. Gruevski, the Prime Minister and leader of VMRO-DPMNE, addressed the voters with the following promise: 'Give me an overwhelming majority and no one will blackmail me!' And indeed he won 63 mandates out of 120, eighteen more than at the previous elections. The votes for SDSM dropped from 32 to 27 MPs. The genuine "burning feeling of injustice" (Guelke 2012) amongst many citizens that the nation was under threat of being forcefully deprived of its identity was politically articulated—but also manipulated—mainly by VMRO-DPMNE. In combination with this concentration of power, unconstrained by the existence of a strong opposition or a free and independent press and independent civil society organizations, the final result was an absurd twisting of the basic Macedonian identity from having been Slavic to a confusing "little bit of everything"—most of all related to ancient Macedonia. The Skopje 2014 project is a good illustration of this twisted state of mind. And if the "name issue" remains unresolved for long enough, and if the majority of citizens perceive Albanian nationalism as a threat to their security, then nationalism in the country will flourish together with the autocratic form of government by a party or parties perceived as 'saviours', such as VMRO-DPMNE. In such circumstances, SDSM doesn't see much hope of winning at the elections. But playing with nationalism also failed to bring success to SDSM in the local elections held in March 2013.

SDSM is flirting with Macedonian nationalism

Was the violent conflict of 2001 a battle for minority rights or was it an armed attempt at secession? The debate about this issue brought the Macedonian Parliament to the edge of a deep political crisis in August 2012. The government of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE proposed a 'Law on Defenders'. This law granted some benefits for those who had taken part in the 2001 armed conflict on the side of the state's armed forces. The coalition partner in the government, the Albanian party DUI, demanded similar recognition and privileges for the combatants of the previous Albanian guerrilla army, ONA, conveying the threat to Prime Minister Gruevski that the party would leave the government and demand early elections if their demand was not met. The opposition party SDSM decided to play the nationalist card and gave its support to the

government proposal, thus forming together with VMRO-DPMNE an ethnic Macedonian opposition to the Albanian MPs. The crisis was delayed, thanks to applying the useful American “invention” of the filibuster to obstruct the Law on Defenders, with an enormous number of amendments from Albanian MPs, but SDSM lost its credibility in the eyes of the Albanians. Later on, in December 2013, when the MPs from SDSM were illegally ejected from Parliament by force because they obstructed the voting for the budget, the Albanian MPs did not take any action to defend the right of the opposition to filibuster the adoption of the budget. The opposition did not miss the opportunity to ride on the wave of public dissatisfaction with the events in Parliament. The street demonstrations staged by Macedonians degenerated into inter-ethnic violence on the streets, followed by a counter-demonstration of ethnic Albanians. It was in this deeply disturbing political situation that the local elections were held in March this year. Bowing to pressure from EU diplomats, the opposition parties took part in the electoral process. The social democrats decided once again to try to win votes by playing the nationalist card in Struga and Kičevo. Meanwhile, the Albanian political parties, DUI and DPA, also played the same card—the card of Albanian nationalism.

The local elections of March 2013 were thus held in a very tense atmosphere. The local elections were observed by a core team of 11 staff from 9 participating states, with 16 long-term observers and 300 short-term observers deployed throughout the country, in addition to domestic NGOs. In the Statement of Parliamentary Findings and Conclusions (ODIHR/OSCE), the elections were valued as ‘efficient’ but not as ‘fair or honest’.

Although SDSM tried to play the card of Macedonian nationalism, it lost not only the popular vote but also its principles. The elections resulted in an overwhelming victory for the ruling coalition of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI: the VMRO-DPMNE candidates for municipal mayors won in 57 of the country’s 80 municipalities, including the City of Skopje, while its coalition partner DUI won in 14 municipalities. The coalition’s campaign was led with the clear aim of not only defeating the opposition but annulling it at any price, cutting its access to power in the municipalities. The pre-election message repeatedly sent out to voters from the Prime Minister and other ministers engaged in the campaign was: *Vote for us or the municipality will suffer from a lack of money*. In this context, the words of the MP from the ruling party Gorcev in his column in *Dnevnik* (March 2013) sounded like a threat: “The mayors from the opposition are

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unprofitable!” Another piece in *Dnevnik* by an official from the same party, Dimovski, was even more explicit: “Mayors have too much power that can corrupt them. They have to be deprived of such power!”

What was the message sent by the citizens to the opposition when they voted so overwhelmingly for the nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE—especially after the so-called “dark December 24” when MPs from the opposition were beaten and thrown out of Parliament by the police? The message may be summarized thus: ‘We as Macedonians need to unite against our enemies, real or imaginary, and stand behind VMRO-DPMNE, which is not yielding to Albanians, Greeks or Europeans.’ And the following story may serve to clarify this message. Thus, in April 2013 a governmental institution organized a welcoming celebration on the central square of Skopje for Johan Tarculovski, a former policeman sentenced to prison by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at The Hague for killing Albanian civilians in the village of Ljuboten during retaliatory action in the armed conflict of 2001. Tarculovski was welcomed in Skopje as a national war hero. During the celebration, Prime Minister Gruevski and other members of the Government proudly stood in the first row. The Minister of Interior, Jankulovska, discreetly wiped her tears. The whole manifestation was highly emotional and patriotic, reserved only for ethnic Macedonians with similar feelings. At the end, the President of the Republic organized a reception for “our hero”! The same day, as the police reported, several young Albanians were beaten by a mob in the streets. However, this episode does not imply that nationalism is reserved only for Macedonians—Albanian nationalism is also strong, as manifested in November 2012, for example, when Albanians in Macedonia celebrated the birth of the Albanian flag. The news reported that the guests at the central celebration in Skopje, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha and Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Tachi, gave extremely nationalistic speeches, cheered by a crowd chanting “Greater Albania” and waving red Albanian flags (AFP, 25 November 2012).ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, what we say is that the greatest danger for Macedonia as a multiethnic state comes from nationalism as a state ideology. Thus the blockade on Macedonia from Greece over the ‘name issue’, makes Macedonian nationalism more dangerous for the democracy and stability of the country.

Conclusion

SDSM lost the parliamentary elections in 1998 due, above all, to criminal privatization and government corruption. The party was not reformed but retained the old staff and the centralized method of governing. The threatening circumstances in which the party acted led to its leadership focusing on how to concentrate as much power as possible in its hands and how to rule longer. In 1998, however, there was transfer of power from SDSM to VMRO-DPMNE.

The defeat at the following elections in 2006, 2008 and 2011 was due to so-called “burning feelings of injustice” and increased Macedonian nationalism after the armed conflict with the Albanian guerrillas in 2001 and after the threatening exertion of pressure by Greece in the so-called name dispute. The citizens, above all the ethnic Macedonians, felt insulted, and even unsafe. Thus the so-called “burning feeling of injustice” is a constant source for the mobilization and manipulation of the public for election purposes. As long as the feeling of fear and threat exists, the citizens will vote for a party and a leader who present themselves as unyielding saviours in the face of pressures. And this goes along with an authoritarian style of governing, since every “non-patriot” should be removed. The SDSM’s defeat at the local elections in 2013 should also be viewed in this context. It is not a matter of the supremacy of VMRO-DPMNE’s programme, as the members of this party frequently state; it is a matter of elections which the OSCE/ODIHR assessed as not being fair. In the overall political context, however, it can be said that the message is to silence the opposition, whose voice is considered by the governing party as detrimental to the country’s national interests. In this way they are putting political pluralism and democracy into question.

This does not have to mean that the social democratic ideas about social justice and equality are losing their importance and popularity in a country where every third citizen is unemployed and poor and in which division along social lines is growing, so that it is already the greatest among the Balkan countries. Before social justice, equality and democracy, however, there is something more important: the issue of security. What can be expected from citizens who feel frightened, insecure and frustrated? SDSM will increase its prospects of election success if, as the largest political opposition party, it contributes with a coherent policy to ending the spiral of fear and threat which produces and sustains nationalism and authoritarian rule.

The Western Balkans are today more stable than in 2001 or in the 1990s. NATO intervention in Kosovo and the diplomatic and military engagement of the USA and the EU in Macedonia in 2001

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brought more stability. In that situation, the cooperation of all relevant parliamentary political parties in Macedonia, including SDSM, contributed to bringing the war to an end and the signing of the peace agreement (OFA). It should not be forgotten that at such a moment of stability and cooperation with the ‘international community’, SDSM won the elections in 2002.

ⁱ Kotevski N (2013) Macedonia on the top of unfairness. *Utrinski vesnik*, 28 October 2013.

ⁱⁱ In the predominantly ethnic Albanian neighbourhood, the Macedonian flag was taken down and burnt. In a different neighbourhood, a group of around 30 people attacked several children. The police declined to comment on the ethnicity of the perpetrators and the victims, but the local media reported that the children were Macedonian while the attackers were ethnic Albanians (*Balkan Insight* 26 November 2012).

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