

Factors for Strengthening of the Right- Oriented Parties in Macedonia

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Abstract

The text outlines the key factors that contributed to the weakening of the right and losing the elections in 2002 and its gradual strengthening and won the 2006 elections. The paper aims to identify the most important factors in strengthening the right: internal factors, the new concept of party management, the new concept of political marketing, rebranding, new model of voter behavior, socio-economic factors and the weakening of party of competition. Through case of VMRO-DPMNE, the paper test theoretical concepts of reorganization of party ,building new image, market orientation and repositioning the party in the party system - as reasons for the success of a political party.

Key words: *political party, repositioning, political marketing, reorganization*

I. INTRODUCTION

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

The results from survey research¹ show that the majority of citizens in Macedonia share what would be conventionally called “leftist values.” Namely, as much as around 70 percents of respondents favor diminishing social differences and the state provision of public services (even if that requires higher taxes), that the social security of the citizens is to be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the state (and that citizens should not take even partial responsibility for it), the fact that state-

¹ L. Hristova and other authors Scientific reseach project |Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia| reali|ed by Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, University |Ss. Cyril and Methodius|- Skopje. Research report 2010

provided health and educational services should have better quality than the private ones, and that the socialism as a system took care of all people and that system was not repressive. By the same token, they disapprove the freedom of owners of enterprises to make exclusive decisions about the development of the companies – they practically call for a co-decision system. And regarding the distribution of these opinions among the voters for the left and right parties, there is hardly any difference. Only in relation to two questions – out of eleven – respondents showed positions closer to the right: private companies are more successful and the bankrupt companies should not be 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 the intense conflict of the two major “left” and “right” parties – the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE). What then accounts for the difference between these parties and their constituency?

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. Also, there is 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 the required minimum standard of living and completely free health and educational services.

In Macedonia the biggest ideological difference, when it comes to the old socialist system, does not concern the socio-economic aspects of it, but whether the system was repressive or not, 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, the nationality and repressed the possibility of private initiative in the economy. The same difference between the left and the right is present today in a modern context.

The socio-economic factors are not a determining factor in selecting a particular political party either and that applies to the choice for VMRO-DPMNE – the main party of the right-of-the center position – as well. That means that in Macedonia the “principle” of the ideological orientation of the citizens to be predetermined by their socio-economic background does not apply for a long time – with the exception of ethnic and religious background – and rather other factors

pertain, including especially their model of rational choice – the choice for the party which offers the best solutions for them and their families².

II. The Fall of the Right in 2002

In the 2002 elections, on September 15, SDSM and its coalition partners won the biggest number of parliamentary seats and along with the new – ethnic Albanian – Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) 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 party's electoral manifesto put an emphasis on the activities that they have undertaken as a ruling party, in particular resolution of the civil conflict a year before the elections and the preservation of the security and the reforms undertaken in the field of economy, education, social policy, and youth issues. During VMRO-DPMNE rule, the opposition as well as a number of media, business interest groups, and civil society organizations criticized the policies and measures undertaken in certain sectors. In the manifesto, the party, addressing those dilemmas, once again wanted to stress the reform orientation: "Certainly at times, in a short time interval, the reforms cause dilemmas 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"³. In order to better explain their prior activities, the party published a "White Paper of VMRO-DPMNE." The program was dominated by right-wing conceptions, the most prominent of which was the concept of attachment of the party to the idea – which it has been promoting since the period of creation of pluralism – autonomous and independent Macedonia, especially due to the present danger of jeopardizing the independence and the integrity during the civil conflict. The main slogan of the program and of the campaign was "(Keep your) Chin Up" as a synonym of pride which should refer to the feeling of pride that each citizen should have, because the 2001 conflict was bridged over, and a peaceful period was ahead bringing much greater success for everybody.

III. Foundation of the Future Victory: Choice Theory

The findings from Rosenfield's research suggest that "candidate-centric intraparty reforms have a significant effect on party system change in subsequent elections while interparty reforms have a significant effect on change in electoral volatility, though that effect is dampened when also accounting for intraparty

² See more Randall Calvert, *Identity, Expression and Rational* (2001) (Washington University, St. Louis, 8- 16 pp

³ Manifesto of the VMRO-DPMNE for the General (Parliamentary) Election 2002 see: www.vmro_dpmne.org.mk

reforms”⁴ After VMRO-DPMNE became an opposition party, major internal changes were launched. At the party congress in 2003 the change of the party leader and entire leadership took place. The president of the party thus far and at the same time Prime Minister, Ljubčo Georgievski, on his own initiative, left the presidential position and with a secret ballot of the delegates at the party congress, Nikola Gruevski, former minister without portfolio, minister of trade and minister of finance in the 1998 – 2001 period, was elected party president. He was a close associate of the Prime Minister Ljubčo Georgievski before and during the congress, who supported him publicly to become president of the party. Within the party and in the public, Gruevski was considered a reform-oriented politician, moderate in his public appearance and in the actions he undertook, and a politician who introduced managerial approach in the public policy-making during his ministerships. The change of the party leader led to changes of most of the members of the party leadership. The process of reforms and revival of VMRO-DPMNE gradually started. It was due to several reasons:

Better intra- party democracy and change in the approach towards election of party officials. The intra- party democracy is most important for improvement of the party position and for start- up of a party reform..There are many instruments for intra- party democracy, but here are limited in two groups. “A first group of internal democratization instruments involves the organization of free, fair and regular elections of internal positions as well as candidates for representative bodies. The second group involves a different group of instruments that entail the equal and open participation of all members and member groups in such a way that interests are more or less equally represented”⁵.

The "bottom-up" approach was introduced as a practice, providing opportunities to the 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 everybody, depending on their abilities, to advance in the party. The party functions were no longer reserved only for certain people but were made available to everyone who has the capacity for it. This created a new democratic climate within the party.”⁶

⁴ See more S. Shair- Rosenfield Not Just between but Within: Evaluating the Effects of Inter- and intraparty reforms on Party System Change (2012) American Political Science Association, Annual Meeting Paper

⁵ J. Mimpen, *Intra- Party Democracy and it's Discontents*, (2013) Netherland Institute for Multiparty Democracy, pp 3

⁶ From the interview with Ilija Dimovski, MP from VMRO-DPMNE (June 2010, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia)

Change in the way of creating the party program. The party opened itself for new ideas, both to the membership and to all citizens, who had interest in submitting their proposals on what the party needs to pay more attention to and how to overcome pending problems. "A professional approach was practiced in policy-development and a scientific approach was introduced in offering solutions to the problems."⁷

Organizational strengthening. The process of consolidation of the party at local level has started, through enhanced activities of the municipal chapters and strengthening their position in the process of decision-making within the party. A communications centre of the party was established, which, as the first of its kind within any party in the country, had the task to professionalize 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 of the party.

Ideological re-profiling and positioning on the political market. The party started the process of distancing from the stigma (created from the opponent parties) it had in the public as a party which advocated hard-core nationalism, patriotism based only on national folklore and glorification of the Macedonian history, a part of the leadership with "bulgarophilic" orientations⁸, and a party, which, during its four-year mandate, initiated the 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., the tradition, patriotism and "demo-christianity," while adding to it recognition as a reformed center-right party with greater internal democracy. It started to move from the "traditional right" towards the center-right. Retaining the "old" right-wing proclamations promotion of a new concept of governance with responsibility and transparency, faith in god, conservation of the tradition and history, respect for the family and advocacy for some conservative values, it started to build its doctrine, based on the real problems people had and, thus, adapting its undoubtedly right concept titled "Doctrine of the party's commitment to the real person."

⁷ From the interview with Aleksandar Spasenovski, MP from VMRO-DPMNE (June 2010, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia)

⁸ Position that Macedonian language, culture and history have Bulgarian origin

**Extracts of some right-wing positions
from VMRO-DPMNE's Doctrine**

We don't talk about the 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 the points of orientation for the real person facing the challenges of transition and globalization.⁹

About the nation

In times of globalization, the question on the nature and the future of the nation are equally important. The relation of the citizen towards 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, nation and the individual defines the nation as a space for action by the individual¹⁰.

About the market

VMRO-DPMNE advocates for more markets, reduction of the influence of the state on the market and for restricted public administration. The state has primarily a regulatory and controlling function in the economics and in the public sector. It sets the framework in which the citizens, the public institutions and the business sector respect the procedures. It sets out, along with the other relevant political actors, the rules of action in politics, economy and public life¹¹.

About the 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 which take care of the children is a natural form of a community. There is no real alternative to the family. The family turns the child into a decent person. There needs to be harmonization between the work and family. Even though it is hard, it is possible to find balance between the work and the family life. The protection of the mother and the children needs to come first¹².

About the tradition

The historical memory enables renaissance of the tradition. It is necessary to find the old traditional values of the typical Macedonian way of living through the centuries¹³.

About the religion

As a conservative party, VMRO-DPMNE sees the church as a crucial support of the state. Tolerance stems from the faith in god. We consider the religious tolerance essential to the multicultural life in Macedonia. God is one, but we celebrate him differently. Our churches, our mosques, our synagogues are our spiritual temple¹⁴s.

⁹ Doctrine of VMRO-DPMNE 7p

¹⁰ Ibid 8p

¹¹ Ibid 10p

¹² Ibid 16p

¹³ Ibid 19p

¹⁴ Ibid 20p

Elections between election cycles

In 2004 the early presidential election was called due to the tragic death of the Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski. In this election, VMRO-DPMNE ran with its presidential candidate 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 the voters that the party offers a candidate who has no political past, and thus, being a new face on the political scene, he gives hope for a new way of doing politics. The position of the party was that their opponent, SDSM's Branko Crvenkovski, as they stated in their public appearances, "due to his dark past as a prime minister" could not lead the country. On the other hand, SDSM treated the fact that VMRO-DPMNE candidate had no political experience as a weakness rather than an advantage claiming that Macedonia needed a statesman; with the eponymous slogan "Crvenkovski - statesman," SDSM won the election. SDSM leader became the president of the Republic of Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE did not concede the defeat, and – claiming a great number of election irregularities – they did not recognize the Crvenskovski as a legitimate president.

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 their biggest competition, SDSM. There, the inability of the president of the state to carry out a party leadership created a crisis in the process of party management.

The following year, 2005, local elections took place. Traditionally, the local elections in Macedonia are the best test for the popularity ratings of parties in the middle of the election cycle. Through local elections the citizens can suggest the winners of the upcoming parliamentary elections. VMRO-DPMNE together with several smaller parties formed a coalition called "For Better Macedonia" and ran with the slogan "Results Now!" Through the slogan and through the public performances they emphasized the unfulfilled SDSM's promises and their commitment to visible and quick results if they win the mayoral seats or the municipal councils.

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 the residential area where the seat of the municipality is, we can categorize them into rural and urban ones and, also, for the sake of better illustration, into small, medium and large ones. Altogether there are 83 municipalities in the country and the coalition "For Better Macedonia" won in the large urban municipalities Bitola and Prilep, in the smaller urban municipalities Radoviš, Valandovo Pehčevo, Sveti Nikole and Kratovo, and in the eight rural municipalities. But it won in almost all municipalities in the city of Skopje and its independent candidate, businessman Trifun Kostovski, managed to get the mayoral

seat¹⁵. Both major parties declared themselves winners: VMRO-DPMNE because it won in the city of Skopje and large urban municipalities, and SDSM because they succeeded in the higher number of municipalities overall. Nevertheless, these elections were a sign of the gradual return of VMRO-DPMNE to the positions of power and restoring the confidence in the party among the party supporters.

IV. Return of the Right in 2006

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

Poor economic and political situation in the country

Traditionally, from the moment of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia has been in a poor economic and social situation with high unemployment rate, a large number of bankrupt companies (and thus a large number of redundant workers), low wages, a large percent of the poor and the people living on the edge of the existential minimum, low quality of public services etc. These socio-economic factors varied in time, but they have persisted during all governmental compositions, and there was no continuity or strong momentum in overcoming them. Most citizens are so-called rational voters; they make their decision on the basis of their socio-economic position. They vote for the party which offers more opportunities 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. SDSM's government at that time was blamed by the opposition for the growing economic crisis in the country, rising unemployment, partisan employments in the state administration, lack of sufficient democratic procedures in the decision-making as well as increased corruption and crime.

Weakening and rupture of the competition

“Parties can have a defined hierarchy like those examined by Michels, they can be loosely organized umbrellas for unorganized individuals or for smaller organizations (factions), they can be grouped in alliances, or their structural system

¹⁵ Information in accordance with official results, published at the web-site of the State Election Commission (www.sec.mk)

can lie somewhere in between these extremes”¹⁶. Lack of intra- party democracy in the Macedonian political parties and lack of capability to manage with informal factions are reasons for founding small parties. A process of factions started within the ruling SDSM, which resulted in the formation of a new political party, New Social Democratic Party (NSDP), whose leader became Tito Petkovski, a senior party official in SDSM, 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 the left center of the ideological map of the country. SDSM faced increasing problems with consolidation of the party trying to establish a viable management and putting up a leader who would replace Branko Crvenkovski. Almost all political parties in Macedonia are so called “leader-based parties” where the leader has a dominant position, and makes the largest number of the important decisions alone. SDSM members needed to come up with the leader that would lead them to victory but that would also restore the party discipline. The unsteady competitive position of SDSM only worked in favor of VMRO-DPMNE.

Process of schism and strengthening of VMRO-DPMNE

In the period between the election cycles, there was a splinter of the hard-core right wing of the party, led by its previous president Ljubčo Georgievski, who eventually established VMRO – People’s Party (VMRO-NP). 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 the newly recruited ones. The split, on one hand, meant a loss of the part of the membership and supporters to the new party, but on the other hand, it contributed to a clearer profile of the reformed VMRO-DPMNE, both ideologically and in terms of personnel. It facilitated the official distancing from the old ideological views, political and personnel decisions, due to which VMRO-DPMNE suffered previously a great deal in the public opinion.

When the factional activities that tend to divide a party and lead to the creation of a new party settle down, it is expected 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 in the pre-election period. And these pre-election period actions came to differ from all previously known activities to any political party in Macedonia as VMRO-DPMNE started to work with a new model of political marketing.

¹⁶ S. Morgenstem, *Organized Factions and Disorganized Parties (2001) Journal of Party Politics, SAGE, pp 235*

A new model of political marketing and concept of the election strategy

“No longer is political marketing conceived simply as about spin or snappy slogans in election campaigns: it is much more about behavior, as well as organization, policy design and leadership”¹⁷ VMRO-DPMNE in these elections applied an electoral strategy, which until then was not applied by any party. The party implemented an election concept which in theory is characteristic for much of the modern political parties and is called the concept of market-oriented party¹⁸. Namely, based on a survey of the political market (voter behavior), the party obtained a good knowledge of the needs of the different strata of citizens in different regions of the country, and, along with the knowledge of the undecided voters – their expectations and needs. Based on this body 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 strategy. The general strategy included an appeal to the entire constituency whereas the segmented parts addressed particular segments of voters such as pensioners, youth, unemployed, and women. This kind of appeal to specific segments was evident in the election program but also in the public appearances such as meetings with specific target groups. In this way, VMRO-DPMNE’s campaign adapted the clear right concept and moved closer to their motto, proclaimed in their doctrine: to come closer and take care of the real person, that is, to offer real solutions to real human problems. This actually happened in line with the interpretation that some party officials gave in terms of defining the party as a people’s party. Namely, “the party is 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.”¹⁹ Also, for the first time a lengthy electoral manifesto with a complex structure was offered to the public.

New concept of electoral program (manifesto)

The electoral manifesto contained 110 pages, which is approximately five times more than the previous programmatic document did. The program was divided

¹⁷ J. Lees-Marshment and C. Rudd, *Political Marketing and Political Leadership (2003) PSA Conference, pp 5*

¹⁸ Become market-oriented party, as wrote Lees-Marshment : understand the demands of the public, and design a ‘product’ to suit .The party product includes many different factors: policy, organisation, symbols, constitution, traditional, ideology, activities such as party conferences, membership, communication staff – and the leader. Indeed, the Party leader is a crucial aspect of the party product, even in a non-presidential system. Leaders are the most visible indication of what the party stands for and what it is likely to deliver should voters elect it to government.

¹⁹ From the interview realized for this article with Mr Ilija Dimovski MP-, director of the Center for Communication of the political party VMRO-DPMNE

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 system, political system, culture, population and demographic policy, tourism, protection of the environment and the like. The manifesto was titled “Rebirth in 100 Steps.” With this slogan, the steps themselves symbolized 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, i.e. it specified the objective, the activity that should be taken and the costs thereof, as exemplified below:

Light in the tunnel

Objective: to temporarily solve the unemployment in 20 poorest municipalities, the objective is over four years 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 new development concept articulated largely in economic terms. The measures and projects proposed in the area of industry, energy, agriculture and small and medium enterprises prevail in the program. Most frequently used 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. Also, most often used words featured 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.²⁰

The process of drafting the electoral program was based on previous consultations with experts in specific areas which this party emphasized as an important feature. “Lots of renowned local experts from the 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.”²¹

²⁰ L. Hristova, Research Report

²¹ Manifesto of the VMRO-DPMNE for the General (Parliamentary) Election 2006. Part: Introduction

“Over the course of their lives, voters develop perceptions of partisan identities through their own observations of the party and its behavior. They learn what to associate with the prototypical Democrat or the prototypical Republican, and they use these prototypes to inform their identity. These prototypes compose a party brand”²² Since the party’s formation until the elections in 2006, the party’s brand was the red color and a lion with two tails. During the elections in 2006, the party partially rebranded itself by changing its color to orange. There were different interpretations why the party decided to change the recognizable color. According to some, it was a sign a 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 mode of operation. According to others, the party wanted to offer an association to 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 (SP), Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (DOM), Party of European Integrations (PEI) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). The coalition government program included many of plans, projects and measures envisioned by the VMRO-DPMNE manifesto. The new government has been largely consistent in implementing these activities. It also monitored the results of implementations in terms of their congruence with the program, a degree of the objectives met, and whether the realization incurred additional costs compared to the government program. By Macedonian standards it was unprecedentedly easy for citizens to keep the government accountable for implementation of its promises. This facilitated a process of a gradual building of trust towards political parties and the electoral programs in general among the people. Accordingly, it help the idea that parties ought to realize what they promise and that the electoral manifesto is not a simple propaganda tool but a record of all obligations to take roots among the population.

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²² N. Lupu, *Brands and Partisanship* (2012(Midwest Political Science Assoiation, pp 3

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