



**SOLUTIONS FOR THE MACEDONIAN POLITICAL CRISIS AFTER
THE RESIGNATION OF MINISTERS IN THE CABINET
-SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CIVIC MOVEMENT -**



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1. The Macedonian dead-end and three possible ways out of it

These days, looking from afar, Macedonia resembles a boxing ring with two tired boxers in a clinch. VMRO-DPMNE has long ago imposed its vision of an authoritarian rule. Following the publication of materials by the opposition that documented the rule of VMRO-DPMNE, the party leadership has lost the confidence of all objective citizens. SDSM, after years of wandering along the paths of an opposition party, rightly requires change and a resignation of the government.

It is important to emphasize that the current political situation is not constituted by inter party relations, but also bears a profound civic dimension. Since the beginning of the student protests initiated last autumn as a response to the repressive higher education law adopted in January 2015, through the part-time workers' protests to the protests sparked on 5th May 2015 demanding the resignation of the government, the processes of social transformation have been led by the civic movement in Macedonia. Much of this movement is the result of grass root initiatives and not of political parties. This movement has not been organized in a formal way in the threefold sense of the word: a) the decisions are taken by direct participatory democratic debate and consensus, b) the initiators and the leaders are not NGO's, and, finally, (c) the activism of all involved is based on volunteering and protest. The authentic civic movement needs to maintain its autonomy and its initial reservations towards the biggest political parties in Macedonia, both the ruling coalition and the opposition. Throughout this year of rallies, the common ground of action for the movements has been heterogeneity in terms of party affiliation while the motto stated "the essence of the political is beyond party interests and logic." From such a position of party heterogeneity, the movement has the legitimacy and the obligation to propose its own view on the exit of the crisis.

In conditions in which the opposition does not participate in the

work of the parliament, nobody can trust the credibility of early elections organized by the current government. What is the best solution or the least evil for Macedonia today?

Many analysts, political parties and media have put forward three solutions so far. The first is by those close to VMRO-DPMNE insisting on the continuation of its reign based on their conviction that the replacement of three of its highest ranking officials would be sufficient. The leader of SDSM has suggested two possibilities: either an expert government or a technocratic government, which we will treat here as practically the same option. A unity government would be the third option which is mentioned by some analysts who are aware that the current situation can be overcome only through dialogue and political compromise.¹

2. What gains and what loses Macedonia in each of these options?

Option 1: Maintaining of the *status quo*: The wire tapped recordings released by the SDSM support the fears of the citizens conveyed in a study conducted by the Macedonian Center for European Training in July 2014, according to which 57% of the respondents believed that the authorities knew who voted how and 64% believed that the government wiretaps its political opponents. 65% of the respondents said they were against the spectacular arrests shown live on TV. 79% of respondents said that the employment in state institutions based on party membership is unfair.

The mistrust and fear among the citizens is not surprising given that the institutions of the system have been functioning in an undemocratic way for too long. Since December 2012 when the opposition was literally thrown out of the Parliament, the bare minimum for a parliamentary debate died out completely. The public media service, MRTV has reported favoring the interest of the ruling parties. Most of the private media are also controlled by the government, while the judiciary has utterly lost their

¹ Heather Grabbe, "The deep roots of Macedonia's current turmoil – and the way forward," Open Democracy (13.05.2015), available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/heather-grabbe/deep-roots-of-macedonia%27s-current-turmoil-%E2%80%93-and-way-forward>

independence. The promise of an economic prosperity did not materialize in the daily lives of citizens. Probably the only positive dimension of the current government is the macro-economic stability of the Denar and relatively high state reserves. In short, this option has long been bankrupt and the government can maintain it only through force.

Option 2. Expert and/or a technocratic government: Transitional government is certainly necessary to ensure conditions for fair and democratic elections. However, a transitional government in a society with corroded democracy should also provide the necessary minimum democratization of the institutions and the public. Such a decision should result from a clear and transparent political will. The completely politicized administration and expert community are thoroughly incapable for such an undertaking. Even the most technical aspect of its obligations will not be performed by either the administration or experts without discrediting the process.

Option 3. A unity government: All political actors should take full responsibility for the exit from the dramatic situation in which Macedonia is now. This means that the combated political parties should form a broad coalition of a unity government and, hence, take full responsibility for the exit. In this process their contribution will be both transparent and accountable, because there would be no opportunity to hide behind screens as experts and administration. This government needs to force the political actors to discuss, to learn to conduct a dialogue and to share responsibility for the governing of the country. A broad coalition is a solution that the international community has mentored and whose success it guaranteed during the conflict in 2001. This makes this model of a solution more acceptable than the one based on experts and the administration.

The third option is more favourable for the civil society as an important factor in the changes that have occurred in the past. Below we will try to explain why.

Whatever the shape of the transitional government, it must not

last less than 12, or 18 months ideally, in order to come up with a reliable electoral roll, repairing the damages that will result from the political escalation and polarization of the society, democratizing the media and establishing a favourable climate in the general public that will allow genuine democratic choice for the citizens.

3. Why will the civil movement profit from a unity government?

A unity government will provide the civic movement with an opportunity to continue its struggle for democratic and functional institutions as independent of any party interests. The civic movement's role in the social changes will be legitimized and the line of demarcation from the parties will be drawn. "The Leftist Movement Solidarity" has already announced a [proclamation](#) that calls for the unity government solution. Considering that the general political culture of Macedonia has been one of clientelism, the public figures established as experts prior to the wave of grass root riots, have proven to be politically biased to the extent of provoking profound reservations toward their impartiality regardless of their affiliation. During the students' and professors' protests, during the high school students' and teachers' plenum movement as well as that of the "honorarium workers," new advocates of new ideas have emerged directly from the grass root initiatives themselves

Based on data from *Freedom House* and other relevant international sources, authoritative studies such as *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe* co-authored by Sten Berglund,² Macedonia is placed in the group of countries in Eastern and Central Europe with stable hybrid regimes since the fall of communism to this day. What is different from the year of publication of this study to date is that Macedonia has strengthened its position of a hybrid regime and has moved towards open autocratic totalitarianism. According to Freedom House, Macedonia is rated as a partly free country moving toward "not free", placed on the 120th position with regard to the freedom of the media in 2013.

² Sten Berglund et al., *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe* (Edward Elgar Publishing: 2013), 4-10

According to *Reporters Without Borders*, Macedonia today is at the alarming 136th place in the freedom of the press. This suggests that the stable form of a hybrid regime which has existed since the beginning of the 90's has escalated towards authoritarian totalitarianism.

On the other hand, the fact that Macedonia has always represented a sort of soft dictatorship or a hybrid regime³ implicates that a possible return to the previous political establishment without the continuous pressure of the civic movement toward a change of the general political paradigm would mean a return of the hybrid regime in its previous form. Unfortunately, this would be the positive outcome. A worse and a more certain outcome would be the following: given the severity of the collision between the main ruling party and the biggest opposition party, and given the revolutionary discourse present in both parties, if elections are won too fast only by one of the two parties Macedonia will sink ever deeper into autocracy. In order to accomplish some more fundamental and lasting change, a transitional unity government that will last for 18 month (or at least 12 months) is imperative in order to enable national reconciliation and fair and free elections.

Advocating for a unity government would also be a faithful reflection of the civic movement's commitment to mobilization beyond party and ethnic interests.

³Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal Of Democracy* (2002): 51-65.

