



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM NORTH MACEDONIA'S GENERAL ELECTIONS

Right-wing opposition ousts ruling Social Democrats from power

10 May 2024

SUMMARY

In North Macedonia's transformative national election this week, opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, led by Hristijan Mickoski, has achieved an historic victory, securing a decisive 43.2% in the parliamentary vote. Simultaneously, their Presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova is set to become the country's first female president, with 65.1% of the vote.

Both outcomes reflect a strong public demand for substantial governance reform and a re-evaluation of the national EU accession strategy, amidst growing dissatisfaction with the incumbent Social Democrats (SDSM), who also faced allegations of corruption and inefficacy.

The VMRO-DPMNE victory sets the stage for the party to form the new government, likely including a coalition with the opposition group VLEN, which secured 10.7% of the vote. This partnership is expected to provide VMRO-DPMNE with a stable majority, enabling a robust agenda focused on anti-corruption measures, judiciary reforms, and economic revitalization. The new administration is poised to prioritize initiatives that stimulate growth, attract foreign investment, and enhance the business environment. In terms of foreign policy, the new government faces the complex task of balancing nationalist policies with the pragmatic requirements of EU accession, including the sensitive issue of explicit constitutional reference to the Bulgarian minority as founding people of the independent and sovereign state.

As VMRO-DPMNE prepares to govern, their ability to navigate these challenges will be crucial in determining North Macedonia's trajectory towards stability and European integration. The effectiveness of these policy shifts, coupled with strategic international engagements, will define the country's path forward in the regional and global arenas.



Below, Aretera provides an overview of the parliamentary and presidential election results, possible scenarios going forward, as well as likely political and policy implications.

ELECTION RESULTS BREAKDOWN

Parliamentary Elections Results		
Party/Alliance	Popular Vote (%)	Number of MPs
Your Macedonia (VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition)	43.2	58
For a European Future (SDSM-led coalition)	15.4	18
European Front (Albanian minority bloc)	13.8	19
VLEN Coalition (Albanian minority bloc)	10.7	13
Levica (left-wing nationalist)	6.7	6
ZNAM (left-wing populist)	5.6	6
Total		120

Presidential Election Results (Run-Off Vote)		
Candidate/Alliance	Popular Vote Share (%)	Number of Votes
Gordana Siljanovska Davkova (VMRO-DPMNE)	69	561,000
Stevo Pendarovski (incumbent, SDSM)	31	251,889

(Source: State Election Commission of North Macedonia. Turnout: 55.4% in the parliamentary elections, 47.5 in the Presidential election run-off.)

POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

On 8th May, voters went to the polls in North Macedonia to elect a new Parliament and President, following the first round of Presidential elections on 24th April. Both elections occurred against a backdrop of intense political dynamics and significant societal debates that deeply influenced voter sentiment and the eventual outcomes.

Led by Hristijan Mickoski, the leading opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) capitalized on widespread public discontent with the ruling Social Democrats (SDSM) of Dimitar Kovačevski. This discontent centered on accusations of corruption and perceived concessions to foreign pressure regarding EU accession terms, particularly from Greece and Bulgaria.

VMRO-DPMNE has secured an outright parliamentary majority, winning 43.2% of the vote, followed by SDSM with 15.4%. The next government will most likely include the opposition party VLEN, which won 10.7% of the vote, providing VMRO-DPMNE with a stable majority moving forward. The Presidential run-off saw VMRO-DPMNE candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova win 69% of the vote, becoming the country's first female President.

With the VMRO-DPMNE now leading both the Presidency and the parliament, North Macedonia faces a period of potential major political and policy shifts. The new government's approach to EU accession will be particularly scrutinized, as it must balance national policies with the requirements of EU integration, which include constitutional reforms to formally recognize ethnic minorities, combating corruption, and reforming the judiciary.

Another challenge is to ensure cohesion in the government's functioning with VLEN, as the likeliest coalition partner from the minorities bloc, given the different stances on some of the most crucial questions for the country's European future.

The elections have set the stage for a transformative period in North Macedonia's political landscape. The effectiveness of the new administration in addressing these complex issues while navigating the path toward EU membership will be crucial in determining the future stability and growth of the country.

SHORT-TERM POLITICAL & POLICY IMPACT

Revitalizing the economy will be a top priority for the new government, with initiatives likely focused on attracting foreign investment, improving the business environment and increasing employment opportunities. Efforts to stimulate economic growth may involve supporting innovation, enhancing conditions for small and medium enterprises and creating an attractive climate for foreign direct investments.

In light of the SDSM-brokered 2018 Prespa Agreement, which ended a long-standing dispute with neighbouring Greece and reset bilateral relations, the government may look to strengthen national identity and address public grievances related to cultural heritage. This could perhaps extend to educational reforms and initiatives aimed at strengthening the Macedonian cultural narrative, ensuring that national identity is preserved amidst international integration.

In terms of foreign policy and EU integration, the path to EU accession is expected to dominate the new administration's agenda. The new government is likely to adopt a tougher stance in negotiations with the EU, particularly regarding the constitutional recognition of a Bulgarian ethnic minority among the nation's founders, striving to balance national sovereignty with the steps required for EU membership.

Relations with neighboring Bulgaria will accordingly be critical, especially in resolving ongoing disputes that impact EU accession. The government will need to carefully manage these relationships, balancing national interests with the demands of EU integration processes.

Furthermore, as a NATO member, North Macedonia is expected to continue strengthening its ties with the Alliance, enhancing its defense capabilities and participating in joint security initiatives, which will remain a cornerstone of its international security policy.

LOOKING AHEAD


Moving forward, the VMRO-DPMNE-led government will also face significant challenges. Judicial and administrative reforms, while necessary, may face resistance from entrenched interests that are opposed to change.

Economic challenges such as unemployment and underinvestment require innovative solutions in a global climate still recovering from recent upheavals. The internal political landscape is also very sensitive and changes within the minorities political block may also bring some ambiguity in terms of the future course of policy making.

Furthermore, balancing nationalist policies with the need for ethnic integration will be a delicate task, particularly in resolving ongoing disputes with neighboring countries that impact EU accession and the need for stronger focus on the reform agenda within the European integration process. The success of these negotiations, aligned with national laws and EU standards, will critically impact North Macedonia's path toward EU membership and define its role in regional stability.

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If you would like to schedule a discussion of this paper, please contact:
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