

Election Monitoring is a world observatory of electoral ballots. A guide that, time after time, will make public the electoral results and strategies of countries to which the western media don't give a voice. Everything will be accompanied by a summarized report on the socio-economic as well as political conditions of the countries under scrutiny

ELECTION MONITORING

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Grazia Neri/AFP

SLOVAKIA

■ The country on the eve of elections

Slovakia has left the last vestiges of its Socialist past behind and now appears to be a country with a dynamic economy which is nearing European Community social standards. In recent years, its economic growth has been among the strongest on the continent and inflation, its traditional weak point, has now been brought under control. The unemployment rate, on the other hand, despite having been reduced, continues to remain at a very high level of close to 15%.

Bratislava has had great success in the international sphere, having joined the EU and NATO in 2004 and been elected a member of the UN Security Council in 2005. The country is also a member of the World Trade Organization. Slovakia hopes to become part of the euro area on 1 January 2009. Despite its economic and foreign policy successes, the country is experiencing strong social and nationalistic tension, as the growing support for the Slovakian National Party (SNS), a xenophobic and populist party, proves.

■ Voting: how and for whom

The National Council of the Slovak Republic (Narodna rada) was elected on 17 June by Slovakian citizens aged over 18. For the first time, Slovak citizens

_DKU-DS leader Mikulas Dzurinda, accompanied by his wife and two daughters, voting at a polling station during the recent elections in Slovakia

resident abroad were given the opportunity to vote by absentee ballot. The closed party-list system is used, with proportional representation using the Hagenbach-Bischoff method and greatest remainders calculation for leftover seats. Voters can cast four preferential votes. Each party must obtain at least 5% of the national vote to gain parliamentary representation, even if it has formed a coalition with other parties. The National Council accords or denies confidence in the Prime Minister.

■ Elections

Socialist Prime Minister Robert Fico stood for re-election with the successes obtained during his mandate to his credit but with an unknown factor deriving from the traditional fragmentation of the Slovak electorate and the problem of the Slovak National Party. Observers estimated, in fact, that the PM would not be able to form a coalition of the Left and Right parties and would therefore have to resort to a pact with the centre-right opposition and the minority Hungarian party following the elections. The result of the elections was unexpected, with the Socialists

SLOVAKIA IN FIGURES

Area	49,036 sq. km
Capital	Bratislava (446,819 inhab.)
Population (2006)	5,401,000
Ethnic groups	Slovak 85.8%, Hungarians 9.7%, others 4.5%
Religions	Roman-Catholic 68.9%, Protestant 10.8%, Greek-Catholic 4.1%, others and Atheists 16.2%
Languages	Slovak 83.9%, Hungarian 10.7%, others 5.4%
Currency	1 koruna = 37.738 € (29/08/2006)
International dialling code	+421
Web domain	.sk

Source: Cia, Wb, Ecb

FREEDOMS IN SLOVAKIA

Death penalty	Abolitionist
Index of political rights	1
Index of civil liberties	1
Status	Free country
Assessment of the elections by international observers	n. a.

Note: points go from 1 (total freedom) to 7 (lack of freedom)

Sources: Amnesty International, Freedom House

ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

GDP (PPP), 2005	70.187 bln €
GDP growth, 2005	+5.5%
GDP per capita (PPP) – 232 countries, 2005	12,941 € (63)
competitiveness index (117 countries)	36
human development index (177 countries), 2003	42
female development index, (140 countries), 2003	37
year women received right to vote	1920
life expectancy, 2006	74.73 years
combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment	75.2%

Source: Undp, Wb, Wef

doubling the number of seats and the nationalists gaining an excellent 12% of the vote.

Once he was officially appointed by the President of the Republic, Fico began negotiations across the political sphere. The opposition parties tried to force the Prime Minister into major concessions by specifying conditions that would be hard to satisfy, but, to everyone's surprise, on 28 June Fico announced a bizarre Left-centre-right coalition with former President Meciar's HZDS party and the nationalists of the SNS.

The European Socialist Party, of which the PM's SMER party forms part, strongly criticised the decision to include the Slovak National Party, judged to be unreliable and xenophobic, in the coalition.

CZECH REPUBLIC

■ The country on the eve of elections

The Czech Republic experienced a major crisis towards the end of the 1990s, with a series of banks going bankrupt; since then, the country has gone through a phase of recovery, sealed in 2004 by its entry into the European Union. Although it is considered an exemplary case of successful transition from a Socialist system to a market economy, the country is still experiencing some problems, from high levels of corruption to the current account and budget deficit. The latter factor could, in fact, put paid to Prague's hopes of entering the euro area by 2010. Following the reform of VAT and social subsidies approved in 2004, the next step is expected to be the restructuring of the health and pensions sectors, which the Social Democrat government prudently postponed to until after the elections.

The presence of one of Europe's strongest Communist parties clashes with strong anti-Communist sentiment among the Conservatives as well as the Social Democrats, with the result that there have been repeated attempts to banish the KSCM (the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia).

■ Voting: how and for whom

On 2 and 3 June, adult Czech citizens aged 18 and up renewed the 200 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Poslanecka Snemovna). The deputies are elected in 14 multi-member constituencies with a purely proportional (d'Hondt) system, with an election threshold of 5% for individual parties, 10% for two-party coalitions, 15% for three-party coalitions and 20% for coalitions made up of four or more parties.

SLOVAKIA: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 17 JUNE 2006

Party	votes%	seats 2006	seats 2002
Direction - Social Democracy (Smer)	29.14	50	25
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party (SdKu-Ds)	18.35	31	28
Slovak National Party (Sns)	11.73	20	/
Party of the Hungarian Coalition (Mkp)	11.68	20	20
People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Ls-Hzds)	8.79	15	36
Christian Democratic Movement (Kh)	8.31	14	15
Others	12.00	/	24
Total (female)		150 (24)	150 (29)

Source: Ipu

THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN FIGURES

Area	78,866 sq. km
Capital	Prague (1,183,729 inhab.)
Population (2006)	10,265,231
Ethnic groups	Czechs 90.4%, Moravians 3.7%, Slovaks 1.9%, others 4%
Religions	Catholic 26.8%, Protestant 2.1%, others and Atheists (71.1%)
Languages	Czech
Currency	1 koruna = 28.155 € (29/08/2006)
International dialling code	+420
Web domain	.cz

Sources: CIA, WB, ECB

FREEDOMS IN CZECH REPUBLIC

death penalty	abolitionist
index of political rights	1
index of civil liberties	1
status	free country
assessment of the elections by international observers	n. a.

Note: points go from 1 (total freedom) to 7 (lack of freedom)

Sources: Amnesty International, Freedom House

ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

GDP (PPP), 2005	160.27 bln €
GDP growth, 2005	+6%
GDP per capita (PPP) – 232 countries, 2005	15,674 € (54)
competitiveness index (117 countries)	29
human development index (177 countries), 2003	31
female development index, (140 countries), 2003	30
year women received right to vote	1920
life expectancy, 2006	76.22 years
combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment	80.5%

Sources: Undp, Wb, Wef

The Chamber, which is elected for a four-year term, accords or denies confidence in the Prime Minister.

■ Elections

The Czech elections took place in the context of a strong and contrived polarization between the governing Social Democratic Party (CSSD) and the conservative ODS party. The strong influence of the

Communist Party following the 2004 European elections, in which the KSCM had become the second-largest Czech political party, was contested equally fervently by the ODS and the CCSD. The conservatives emphasised their anti-Communist rhetoric, while the Social Democrats urged the electorate to cast a “useful vote”. This manoeuvre was partially successful – at the cost, however, of making the country ungovernable. In fact, the Left and the Right obtained 100 seats each and negotiations to form a large ODS-CSSD coalition dragged on without a result all summer long. It is however probable that the two parties will eventually reach an agreement, which should guarantee the conservative leader Mirek Topolánek the post of Prime Minister in the place of the Social Democrat Jiri Paroubek. Meanwhile, Topolánek is also exploring the possibility of setting up a minority Cabinet.

MACEDONIA

■ The country on the eve of elections

Macedonia has been one of the main economic victims of the Balkan Wars, having suffered the loss of markets for agriculture and industry and repeated economic blockades, which have led to impoverishment and mass unemployment. These have, in turn, created ideal conditions for the spread of corruption, a black market economy and criminal activities. The country has in fact become one of the main hubs for heroin refining and traffic.

The exodus of 360,000 Albanians during the Kosovo war exacerbated these problems. This conflict paved the way for a brief but bloody civil war in 2001. Since then, the country has attempted to remount the slope, managing a shaky but significant restoration of internal peace and a reasonable economic recovery. However, Skopje ties all hope of genuine recovery to the prospect of EU membership. The official opening of negotiations with Brussels in 2005 has undoubtedly

CZECH REPUBLIC: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 2/3 JUNE 2006

party	votes %	votes 2006	seats 2002
Civic Democratic Party (Ods)	35.38	81	58
Czech Social Democratic Party (Ccssd)	32.32	74	70
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Kscm)	12.81	26	41
Christian Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (Kdu-Csl)	7.23	13	/
Green Party (Sz)	3	6	/
Kdu-Csl Coalition + Freedom Union - Democratic Union (Us-Deu)	/	/	31
Total (female)		200 (31)	200 (34)

Source: Ipu

MACEDONIA IN FIGURES

Area	25,333 sq. km
Capital	Skopje (506,926 inhab.)
Population (2006)	2,034,000
Ethnic groups	Macedonians 64.2%, Albanians 25.2%, Turkish 3.9%, Roma 2.7%, Serbians 1.8%, others 2.2%
Religions	Orthodox 64.7%, Muslim 33.3%, others and Atheists 2%
Languages	Macedonian 66.5%, Albanian 25.1%, Turkish 3.5%, others 4.9%
Currency	1 denar = 61.1671 € (31/08/2006)
International dialling code	+389
Web domain	.mk

Source: Cia, Wb, Ecb

FREEDOMS IN MACEDONIA

Death penalty	Abolitionist
Index of political rights	3
Index of civil liberties	3
Status	Partially free country
Assessment of the elections by international observers*	Regular, but with unresolved problems

Note: points go from 1 (total freedom) to 7 (lack of freedom)

Sources: Amnesty International, Freedom House

*Osce

ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

GDP (PPP), 2005	12,88 bln €
GDP growth, 2005	+3.7%
GDP per capita (PPP) – 232 countries, 2005	6,270 € (103)
competitiveness index (117 countries)	75
human development index (177 countries), 2003	59
female development index, (140 countries), 2003	49
year women received right to vote	1946
life expectancy, 2006	73.97 years
combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment	69.9%

Sources: Undp, Wb, Wef

been the best news the country has received since the end of the civil war.

■ Voting: how and for whom

On 5 July, Macedonian citizens aged over 18 elected the 120 members of the Assembly (*Sobranie*).

Members of Parliament are elected in 6 multi-member constituencies (20 elected candidates in each) for a four-year mandate. The system of proportional representation (the d'Hondt system) is based on party lists, with no preferences. Each genre must have at least 30% of the candidates on each list.

The Assembly concedes and revokes confidence in the Prime Minister.

■ The elections

During the election campaign, the Macedonian political scenario was marked by violent clashes between the major Albanian parties, the Democratic Union for Integration and the Democratic Party of Albanians. It was only the intervention of the Albanian leaders of Tirana and Kosovo and NATO's threat to stop the process of including the country in its framework that managed, with difficulty, to re-establish the peace. The resounding defeat of the Social Democrats of the Together for Macedonia party gave the victory to the centre-right party Vmro-Dpmne. Its leader Nikola Gruevski then started negotiations with the DUI, which however soon foundered. The leader in name only then turned to the other Albanian party and finally managed to form a coalition with the PDS, the New Social Democratic Party (NDSP), the Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (DOM) and the Party for a European Future. The Gruevski cabinet was immediately marked by the entry of many new faces, thirty-year-olds and expatriates. The stabilizing of the country's economic and social situation and national peacemaking are the primary objectives of the new government. The ongoing discussions to determine the final status of Kosovo will undoubtedly also have repercussions on Macedonian internal policy and could make it difficult once more for the Slav majority to cohabit with the strong and concentrated Albanian minority.

MACEDONIA: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 5 JULY 2006

party	votes %	seats 2006	seats 2002
Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)	32.46	45	33
Together for Macedonia	23.27	32	60
Democratic Union for Integration – Party for Democratic Prosperity (DUI-PDP)	12.11	17	18
Democratic Party of Albanians (PDS)	7.47	11	7
New Social Democratic Party (NDSP)	6.09	7	/
Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – People's Party (VMRO-DP)	6.1	6	/
Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (DOM)	1.88	1	/
Party for European future (PEI)	1.36	1	/
Others	9.26	/	2
Total (female)		120 (33)	120 (21)

Source: Ipu