

the two form a governing coalition, Tupurkovski will be well positioned for his long-anticipated presidential candidacy next year.

## B. SDSM: Victory for Macedonia

As the strongest party in the ruling coalition, SDSM is mounting a well-financed campaign. Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski is running alone, without the benefit of a coalition and without the public support of President Kiro Gligorov who has not endorsed any political leader. Crvenkovski's campaign strategy is to attack and discredit his opponents. If the electorate fears change, then his party offers the safest choice. He paints worst-case scenarios such as VMRO-DPMNE inviting the most radical ethnic Albanian parties, to share power.

SDSM has directed its most intense criticism towards VMRO-DPMNE and DA. Most observers believe Crvenkovski is trying to preserve some good will towards the LDP, in the event that he needs LDP to form a coalition. Most of his attacks have been launched toward Tupurkovski's party platform. He has directly accused Tupurkovski of "betraying global Macedonian interests and the Macedonian people . . . those who are promising \$1 billion, must tell the Macedonians who will donate the money."<sup>14</sup> This strategy may back-fire. If VMRO-DPMNE comes to power, the residual antagonism among the parties may jeopardise the future government.

SDSM's greatest strength is its experience of government. It has the most developed party structure and can afford to put up candidates in all 85 constituencies. Moreover, SDSM has been courting voters in earnest via a series of calculated increases in public expenditure. Government employees have been given a holiday pay bonus; children are to receive free text books; social security benefits will be increased; and back pensions will be paid to those in retirement. The party platform concentrates on Macedonian stability and economic growth.

The greatest dilemma for SDSM is how to run as a party dedicated to "Macedonian" issues without severing ties with the ethnic Albanian community. During the campaign, the party cannot appear to yield to ethnic Albanian separatist aspirations because of the possibility of a backlash from ethnic Macedonians. Despite political posturing, SDSM has in practice proved skilful in working with the ethnic Albanian parties.

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<sup>14</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 25 September 1998.