

III. THE ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK

Parliament adopted a new electoral system after four years of debate in July 1998. The forthcoming elections will therefore be governed by three new laws -- the *Law of the Election of Members of Parliament*, the *Electoral District Law*, and the *Voters' Identification Card Law* -- which incorporate amendments addressing many of the criticisms of the earlier system.

Under the new legislation, parliamentarians are elected by a mixture of a majoritarian, constituency-based system and proportional representation. Of a total of 120 seats, 85 are elected by the former and 35 by the latter system in such a way that it is likely that parliament retains its multi-ethnic character without jeopardising the ethnic Macedonian majority in government. The new framework is also expected to encourage the pattern of a strong ethnic Macedonian party, supported by smaller ethnic Macedonian parties and one or more ethnic Albanian parties in a coalition.

Efforts to promote public confidence in the political process are as important as ensuring that the contents of the law meet international standards. Although, the election laws received the overall support from the parties, there remain some areas of contention. For example, opposition parties consider the media regulations to be lax and fear that there is insufficient education of the voters. Moreover, there are no provisions for Macedonian citizens living abroad to cast ballots.

In late September 1998, VMRO-DPMNE circulated a petition to all the political parties in order to secure their pledged support of "fair and democratic" elections. Of the 16 registered political parties, all but SDSM have signed the declaration. SDSM refused to support the initiative for two reasons. First, the text included the statement, "having in mind the irregularities of 1994 . . ." Secondly, the declaration called for the use of indelible ink to track electors who had voted to make sure that they did not cast a second ballot. Minister of Justice Gjorgji Spasov said that the use of indelible ink was an African practice or only employed in countries emerging from war. He said that Macedonian voters would not submit themselves to such a marking because it was beneath their dignity and potentially branded all voters as traitors.³

A. Electoral System and Procedures

In constituencies, a candidate wins a seat in the first round if the candidate wins a majority of the votes and that number is not less than one third of the total number of registered voters in the district. If no

³ *Dnevnik*, 9 September 1998.