

stemmed from administrative incompetence and poor planning by the State Election Commission (SEC).

Two of the largest political parties viewed the situation differently. The largest nationalist party (VMRO-DPMNE) and DP (*Demokratska Partija* or Democratic Party) boycotted the second round of voting. They believed that their poor showing was the result of fraud, not simply bad polling. The party leaders charged that the international observers, primarily from the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE),¹ arrived late and only witnessed the end of the elections "from their hotel rooms". Petar Goshev, the DP leader, said that most of the fraud did not occur during the elections but before them, through manipulation of the voter register and changes to the boundaries of electoral districts. He argues that had the observers arrived earlier, studied the election law, and witnessed the violations, they would have reached different conclusions.

Despite the protests, international monitors endorsed the elections. The final results showed that President Kiro Gligorov won the presidential race with 52.4 percent of the vote. The Alliance for Macedonia, a coalition formed by SDSM, LDP (*Liberalna Demokratska Partija* or Liberal Democratic Party) and SPM (*Socijalisticka Partija na Makedonija* or Socialist Party of Macedonia), secured 95 out of 120 seats. Due to their boycott, VMRO-DPMNE and DP failed to win any seats in parliament.

Macedonia's first local elections took place in November 1996. The elections for council seats and mayoral posts were held under new laws for local and territorial division. Although the SDSM emerged from the polls as the strongest party, winning 500 of the 1,903 contested council seats and 52 of the 124 mayoral posts, they lost the major cities of Skopje, Prilep, and Ohrid. The polls also confirmed the continued strong support of the ethnic Albanian parties in all of western Macedonia. The nationalist opposition interpreted the 1996 results as a victory.

An opinion poll conducted after the elections found that only 38.6 percent of voters felt the elections were fair and democratic and 35.6 percent believed the elections had irregularities but were generally fair and democratic.² Despite numerous complaints lodged about the accuracy of the voter register, the polling results were accepted by all political parties.

¹ The precursor of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

² Natasha Gabr and Aneta Joveska, "Necessity of Combining the Election Model", *Forum*, December 1997/January 1998, p. 25.