

electoral success of independents, as well as their numbers, attest to the importance of this factor. In a 1997 poll conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research Centre for Ethnic Relations, the biggest factor influencing the 1996 electorate in their votes for mayors and city councillors was personality.<sup>9</sup>

Ethnicity is also an important factor in electoral politics. The most numerous ethnic groups are ethnic Macedonians, who form about 67 percent, and ethnic Albanians, who form about 23 percent of the population. There are a number of small but significant minorities including Turks, Roma, Serbs, and Muslims. Most ethnic Albanians live in a triangular area in the north-west of the republic, adjacent to the borders of Albania and Kosovo, or in the capital Skopje.

Despite frequent threats to leave the government, ethnic Albanian representatives have remained in ruling coalition throughout the life of the parliament. Indeed, the current coalition government is an affirmation of the importance of including ethnic Albanians in public service and has attempted to address some of the issues influencing inter-ethnic relations. Moreover, possible future exclusion of ethnic Albanian political parties from the government may stimulate political crisis. Nevertheless, the coalition remains a delicate balancing act attempting to cater for ethnic Albanian interests, without giving ethnic Macedonians the impression that their national interest is being undermined.

Despite the uneasiness of the current coalition, SDSM has the best record in co-operating with ethnic Albanian parties. LDP is also experienced in working together with the ethnic Albanian parties. VMRO-DPMNE, by contrast, continues to have a problematic relationship with the ethnic Albanian parties. Nevertheless, the party assumes that its likely future status as the largest grouping in parliament will make it an attractive coalition partner. In fact, however, such a coalition is unlikely to come to fruition unless the party learns how to negotiate and how to communicate with ethnic Albanians.<sup>10</sup>

The political strategy being employed by VMRO-DPMNE and DA coalition is an attempt to by-pass the obstacles in gaining ethnic Albanian support without responding to some of their demands. The DA will run nine "Muslim" majoritarian candidates and six "Muslim" candidates on the proportional list. (Most of these candidates are ethnic Albanians but a party spokeswoman preferred to classify the candidates as "Muslim"<sup>11</sup>). DA believes that it can bring ethnic Albanians who are not members of ethnic Albanian parties into the government.

---

<sup>9</sup> Natasha Gabr and Aneta Joveska, "Necessity of Combining the Election Model", *Forum*, December 1997/January 1998, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Dnevnik*, interview with Ljubomir Frckovski, 10 September 1998.

<sup>11</sup> ICG phone call to DA headquarters on 30 September 1998.