

## Macedonia<sup>1</sup>

**IHF FOCUS: Elections; freedom of expression and the media; independence of the judiciary and fair trial; torture, ill-treatment and misconduct by law enforcement officials; conditions in prisons and detention facilities; religious intolerance; conscientious objection; protection of ethnic minorities; protection of asylum seekers; social rights; labor rights; women's rights.**

The process of creating new human rights legislation, which was in progress following Macedonia's admission to the Council of Europe, was suspended in 1999. The decreased interest in improving the protection of human rights was also reflected in practice, particularly through the absence of any independent and efficient legal mechanisms for addressing the violation of individuals' basic human rights.

Until 1999, the courts had played a key role in the protection of human rights. During 1999, however, their decisions in cases involving human rights lacked precision and coherence. The work of the ombudsman improved but was still unable to play an important role as a defender of the individuals' basic rights against abuse by state authorities.

The practical distinction between executive, legislative and judicial branches was weakened by the strong predominance of the executive, which openly exerted pressure on the judiciary and public prosecutor. This development became increasingly worrisome because it was accompanied by the increased influence of political parties in administration: not only were individuals hired on the basis of membership to parties in power, but party party leaders of the governing coalition also demonstrated their influence on administrative issues more often and openly.

### Elections

The second presidential elections since Macedonia gained independence were held on 31 October and 14 November. More than one 1,6 million individuals were registered on the voter lists in 85 election units.

In the first round of elections, six candidates contended for presidency, including Vasil Tupurkovski, leader of the multi-ethnic Democratic Alternative (DA), and Boris Trajkovski of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), both members of the ruling coalition. The first round of elections was conducted without notable irregularities. The International Election Observation Mission of the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe reported "further clear improvement on the past election," and said that the elections were conducted well. It cited only secondary concerns regarding the political campaign and some minor incidents.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, the second round of elections on 14 November was characterized by numerous irregularities.<sup>3</sup> In the vast majority of the country, the second round was carried out in accordance with the law, although some irregularities were reported from western Macedonia and around Skopje. However, large-scale proxy voting, instances of multiple voting and extremely high voter turnout figures were reported from some districts (e.g. Lipkovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Arachinovo and Studenicani), raising concern about their veracity.<sup>4</sup>

On 27 November, the State Electoral Commission and the Supreme Court decided to repeat the election process in 230 polling stations, most of them in areas with an ethnic Albanian majority, thus overturning Trajkovski's victory. The International Election Observation Mission supported this decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, based on Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Republic of Macedonia, Annual Report on the Conditions of the Human Rights in the Republic of Macedonia in 1999.

<sup>2</sup> International Election Observation Mission, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Presidential Elections 31 October 1999, Preliminary Statement.

<sup>3</sup> For the media's role, see Freedom of Expression and the Media.

<sup>4</sup> International Election Observation Mission, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Presidential Elections (Second Round), 14 November 1999, Preliminary Statement.

The second elections were held on 5 December. Again, serious irregularities were reported, including widespread ballot stuffing and multiple voting, resulting in seemingly unrealistic voter turnouts. Moreover, there was an over-representation of party activists at polling stations, creating a tense atmosphere and resulting in at least some violent incidents. The withdrawal of the opposition party, the Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), from polling stations – due to safety concerns - added confusion and reduced the transparency of the elections.<sup>5</sup>

- On three occasions, fights between party activists from the SDSM and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) took place in the villages of Labunishta, near Struga, and Vaksince near Kumanovo. Several SDSM activists were injured, including a deputy of the party. The police denounced all such incidents and the Ministry of Interior stated that the cases would be promptly investigated.

On 15 December, Boris Trajkovski was inaugurated as president of Macedonia.

In the post-election period, fear grew among the Macedonian population that the new president had been elected with the crucial support of ethnic Albanians. There were speculations among the opposition parties that his election confirmed a suspected secret agreement between the governing VMRO-DPMNE and the DPA to federalize the country into ethnic Macedonian and Albanian parts. This fear led to protests by opposition parties against ethnic Albanians, their alleged involvement in election irregularities and, particularly, against their presumed collaboration with the governing parties. Many observers believed that such developments would lead to deteriorating inter-ethnic relations.

According to the Helsinki Committee of Macedonia, the fact that numerous misuses and irregularities were reported in part of the country showed that the State Electoral Commission, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Interior had failed to carry out their duties in conducting fair and democratic elections. The committee also welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to have re-elections, thus removing suspicion that the elections were illegitimate.

According to the Macedonian Helsinki Committee, the political tension caused by irregularities in the electoral process, and the fact that the largest opposition party, SDSM, considered the presidential elections illegitimate, would have an unfavorable impact on political stability in the country for a long time and may even lead to inter-ethnic conflict.

### **Freedom of Expression and the Media**

During 1999, no major changes took place in the electronic media field. Authorities failed to take any measures to eliminate the widespread operation of pirate radio and television stations. Even those with concessions broadcast without paying the bills required by law. The 1997 law on the broadcasting activity remained in force, although it had been widely criticized for not providing independent and transparent licensing and bidding procedures.

The new government, which came into power at the end of 1998 and consisted of three coalition partners, swiftly changed the leadership of the governmental press, the MRTV and the publishing houses Nova Makedonija, Vecer (Macedonian language), Flaka (Albanian language) and Birlik (Turkish language).

The MRTV openly gave its support to the government and its policies.

- In February, the Helsinki Committee began a media campaign for mutual ethnic tolerance. Its program was aired by all media outlets except the MRTV, who refused to broadcast the program even against payment.

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<sup>5</sup> International Election Observation Mission, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Presidential Elections (Second Round Re-Runs), 5 December.

In a positive development, new private publishing houses were opened, with the result that new newspapers were created, bringing a wider variety in the press and gradually destroying the monopoly of NIP Nova Makedonija. However, NIP Nova Makedonija still had the distribution monopoly. Independent newspapers were sold mainly by street-sellers.

There were no official criteria in 1999 for governing the allocation of budget funds to subsidize the media. Seventy-five percent of these funds ended up going to NIP Nova Makedonija, whose shareholder was the government.

The constitution, the law on public information, the law on broadcasting activity and the criminal code all guaranteed the freedom of speech. This freedom was questioned by the Broadcasting Council in a fax sent to A1 television station, which stated that with its criticism of the council's work, A1 had changed its status from a concession holder to a "monitoring service," a role that was not appropriate. In the same message, the council openly intimidated the station by announcing that it would revise the decision to issue a concession to A1.

Media coverage of the Kosovo refugee crisis was generally balanced and objective although media interest evidently decreased as a smaller wave of Serb and Roma refugees arrived later.

### Presidential Elections

Media coverage of the second round of presidential elections was similar to the 1998 parliamentary elections. The printed media - which was mainly financed by the state budget - and the MRTV gave biased support to candidates of the governmental coalition, although the MRTV, as a public broadcast enterprise, should have remained objective.

During the first round of elections, when six candidates were still competing, the MTV in particular reported extensively about the activities of the presidential candidate of the governing party, VMRO-DPMNE, who was the Deputy Foreign Minister at the time. The outlet covered, at length, all of his activities in the main news programs.

The publishing houses Nova Makedonija and Flaka followed the same practice. Before the campaign began, Nova Makedonija decided only to publish advertisements of the coalition parties. The Broadcasting Council issued recommendations for equal coverage in the electronic media, but the recommendation remained ineffective as there was no mechanism by which to punish those outlets that refused to follow the rules.

During the second round of elections, the International Election Observation Mission reported partisan pro-governmental coverage by the MRTV, who supported Boris Trajkovski, while the private channel Sitel TV devoted a large proportion of news programming to a critique of the government. Other monitored electronic media, including A1, Telma, Channel 5, and TV Era, were largely neutral in their coverage. The pro-government and largely publicly-owned daily *Nova Makedonija* continued its biased coverage in favor of Trajkovski. *Utrinski Vjesnik*, again, exhibited a strong bias towards Tito Petkovski of the opposition SDSM. The observation mission noted that the coverage of *Devnik* was particularly balanced.<sup>6</sup>

- On 14 November, the local, private, opposition-oriented television station Sitel (in Skopje) went off the air for several hours, allegedly due to an electric installation defect. On 5 December, the day of the second voting, Sitel and another private station A1" (near Kumanovo) went off the air again for several hours. The police initiated an investigation into the A1 case because its electricity was forcefully cut. Further, Sitel believed that its program was taken off the air intentionally by the management of the electricity company, whose leadership represented the VMRO. On 5 December, VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition

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<sup>6</sup> International Election Observation Mission, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Presidential Elections (Second Round), 14 November 1999, Preliminary Statement.

partner, the DPA, had accused the two stations of breaking the pre-election silence by broadcasting "lies" from the local SDSM headquarters.

### Access to Information

Access to information was guaranteed under the law, but it was impeded in practice by bureaucratic obstacles. Authorities needed the approval of their superiors in order to give information to journalists, for example. The government did not have a spokesman.

### **Independence of the Judiciary and Fair Trial**

The executive exerted pressure on the judiciary.

- The court in the town of Kratovo was raided by police and security agents and forced to issue various warrants.
- In the town of Gevgelija, the Administration for Internal Affairs (UVR) summoned local judges for interrogation because they had cancelled the arrest warrant for a manager against whom charges had been brought. They also sought more information on the case.

The way in which the judicial system operated was of great concern. Cases were unnecessarily complicated, courts operated inefficiently and sometimes breached the law themselves, with the result that individuals faced huge problems in trying to defend their rights. Prolonged proceedings, particularly in civil cases, were commonplace.

One particular problem that seriously affected the judicial proceedings was the process of submitting documents and summoning the parties. In a great number of cases, the parties, witnesses and experts did not appear in court simply because they had not received the summons. As the failure was not recorded, the judges issued orders to bring the individuals to court by force. The police arrested the persons as if they were criminals and detained them for up to eight hours or more, awaiting the court session. Such misconduct tended to drag the cases out for several years. It also led to public indignation and mistrust towards the legal system.

In criminal cases, individuals were often taken into custody awaiting trial, even in cases where they could have been released on bail. In practice, in most cases, the courts only accepted bail in cash, refusing guarantees in real estate or other forms provided under the law. Consequently, those suspects who could not provide the cash payment were kept in detention for a longer period of time. In addition, the legally permissible period of 180 days in detention without charge was often exceeded.

### **Torture, Ill-Treatment and Misconduct by Law Enforcement Officials**

The number of cases in which police exceeded their powers decreased during 1999 but remained a serious concern. Abuses were reported regarding identity checks, investigations, the holding of suspects, the use of physical force and firearms, etc. The lack of sufficient regulations regarding the treatment of suspects in police stations, the observance of detainees' rights, the unsatisfactory legal mechanisms to address alleged police misconduct and the right to compensation in such cases were of particular concern.

The Helsinki Committee in Macedonia conducted a survey among lawyers, revealing numerous cases of police misconduct. The police made illegal arrests; detained persons longer than the legally permissible 24 hours without warrant; failed to inform persons of their rights; did not grant access to legal counsel; used force to obtain confessions; and did not issue any confirmations of the time and reasons for arrest. In addition, during the flow of refugees from Kosovo, international media reported alleged police brutality towards refugees.

The Ministry of Interior incited hysteria against "organized crime" in order to justify certain acts of misconduct. "Organized crime" was also often used as a pretext to the operations of the state security services

(the Agency of State Security Police and the counter-intelligence) in cases of minor economic crimes. The agencies raided companies whose managers supported the opposition parties. The Helsinki Committee witnessed one illegal arrest that was carried out in an unnecessarily spectacular manner. Despite the absence of any proof of involvement in “organized crime” in such cases, the government and the Ministry of Interior put pressure on the Public Prosecutor's Office and the judiciary, accusing them of obstructing the authorities' fight against crime. In addition, the media tended to exaggerate and scandalize such incidents. In most cases of this nature, the presumption of innocence was ignored both by the authorities and the media, who immediately labeled the suspects as criminals. At the same time, real criminals were left at large to corrupt and intimidate the executive and judicial personnel.

According to the Helsinki Committee in Macedonia, the problems arose largely from a lack of coordination within the Ministry of Interior. At least part of the management was clearly under direct pressure from political parties.

### **Conditions in Prisons and Detention Facilities**

The conditions in a prison in Idrizovo, near Skopje, amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment. The poor conditions were not only attributed to the poor economic situation in Macedonia. The prison regiment was repressive and there were virtually no opportunities for reeducation or social reintegration. The heating was inadequate or completely lacking; food and hygiene conditions were sub-standard; there was no hot water, and prisoners were permitted to shower rarely and in big groups. No laundry facilities were available and the prisoners' uniforms, shoes and bed linen were inadequate.

Physical force was used as a punishment to "bring prisoners back to their senses." Prisoners were also sent to solitary confinement as punishment, where the conditions were inhuman. The cells were too small and lacked heating and toilet facilities. In addition, the reasons for sending prisoners to solitary confinement were disputable and prisoners were not informed of the decision in writing.

In Idrizovo, there were no adequate premises for free time activities. Adequate medical care and treatment for drug-addicted prisoners were not available.

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) carried out a mission to Macedonia to observe prison conditions, but the report had not been published as of this writing. The reports by the Helsinki Committee in Macedonian to the government were received without reaction.

### **Religious Intolerance**

Freedom of belief and religion remained restricted in law and in practice. The 1997 law favored “traditional” denominations that were registered as “communities” and enjoyed various privileges. Other denominations, registered as religious “groups,” had to undergo much stricter scrutiny than the traditional religious communities or any other organizations. For example, special conditions were set for their establishment and registration. In addition, they were not allowed to enjoy tax exemptions like other civic organizations.

Religious groups faced a wide range of obstacles and restrictions by the governmental Committee for Religious Affairs. They were represented negatively by the media, for example, as extremely dangerous “sects” which spread lies amongst the young population. They could not establish their property rights, and it was extremely difficult for them to invite foreigners of the same belief to visit them and preach at their meetings. Foreigners were also prohibited from establishing religious groups, and it was difficult for them to even participate in the activities of religious groups.

The Vlach, Serb Orthodox, Turks and the Macedonian Muslims belonging to the Islamic Religious Assembly experienced particular discrimination in law and practice. For example, they were not allowed to speak their own languages in religious rituals.

The privileged status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MPC) was tantamount to a state church. It was represented at all important governmental events and its priests conducted religious rituals on the first school day in public primary and secondary schools. The government introduced a new subject of "catechism" in primary and secondary school curricula. The media also focused its reports on religious activities on the MPC. The MPC faced no major obstacles in establishing property rights within the process of denationalization.

The MPC was indirectly involved in organizing hostile actions on behalf of its own believers against members of other religious communities.

- In Prilep, a hall for meetings of the local Jehovah's Witnesses was prevented from being built on several occasions, and the believers were physically attacked.

As a rule, police failed to intervene in such incidents and protect the victims.

At the end of 1998, at the initiative of one religious group and the Helsinki Committee, the Constitutional Court repealed several articles of the 1997 Law for Religious Communities and Religious Groups that were unconstitutional and discriminatory. For example, the court repealed article 3, which banned "religious work and rituals" by unregistered groups, and the founding requirement of 50 adult members.<sup>7</sup> However, article 8, which only allowed one religious domination for any faith, and article 19, which required permission from the office Committee for Religious Affairs to hold religious events in public places, were not held to be unconstitutional.

### **Conscientious Objection**

There was still no law on conscientious objection in Macedonia, although the constitution guaranteed freedom of conviction, conscience and thought. The Helsinki Committee in Macedonia was in the process drafting legislation in this area.

During 1999, the Helsinki Committee registered two cases of conscientious objection.

- Citing article 341(1) of the criminal code, a court fined Muharem Saliev from Skopje and Sasho Nezirovski from Kriva Palanka, both Jehovah's Witnesses, for refusing to perform military service. The court reasoned that the lenient punishment of a fine would have an educational effect on the two young men and change their attitude about serving in the army. Between June 1995 and the above-mentioned court ruling, Nezirovski had already been sentenced four times for conscientious objection: twice to three months in prison and twice to pay a fine. As of this writing, the fifth case was brought against him.

### **Protection of Ethnic Minorities**

The largest ethnic Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity in Macedonia (PDPA) participated in the new coalition government, formed at the end of 1998. Its participation contributed to better inter-ethnic relations and, consequently, decreased open conflicts between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. On the basis of the February law, and as a result of the achieved political agreement, the Albanian mayors of Gostivar and Tetovo, Refik Dauti and Rifi Osmani, were released. They had been imprisoned in 1997 on the basis of article 319 (inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance), and article 387 (resistance against arrest) of the criminal code after trials that did not meet international standards.

In the absence of a consistent and systematic educational policy to promote inter-ethnic tolerance, violent conflicts emerged between young Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. In the first three months of 1999, 14

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<sup>7</sup> For details, see Human Rights Without Frontiers, "Macedonian Evangelicals Successfully Challenge Restrictive Law," 1 March 1999 and IHF Annual Report 1999.

such conflicts were registered in which students from the secondary schools in Skopje and Kumanovo participated.

The use of minority languages in communication with administrative and legal authorities was restricted. The Constitutional Court ruled that their use was allowed only in municipality councils in areas that enjoyed local self-management. Its 21 June ruling repealed the legal provisions that provided for the right to use a minority language in court sessions, for example. At the same time, the problem of minority languages in the system of higher education remained unresolved.

The decree to use the bilingual names of locations in the municipalities with a significant minority population was not implemented. Also, on 9 December, the Constitutional Court repealed a provision that had regulated the right to raise the flags of the titular countries of minorities, leaving the question open.

Regarding the Roma minority, the government took no serious steps to promote better respect or the protection of their rights. During the 1999 Roma demonstrations against the government's decision to diminish some social rights, the police intervened using particularly violent force. At the same time, complaints about discrimination against Roma in all sectors of life increased. For example, teachers in some schools in Vinica, Prilep, Bitola discriminated against Roma pupils, and Roma were refused service by local authorities and individuals in public service or received poorer service. In some cases, the Ministry of Interior officials exceeded their duties.

- The Ministry of Interior officials used illegal methods and unnecessary force when arresting, investigating and collecting data in the case of Dzhevat Elmazov, a Rom suspected of having committed a crime.

In the primary schools, the number of additional classes in the Vlach language was reduced, and the publication of a new school book for studying the language was arrested.

### **Citizenship**

A large percentage of the Roma community, and even of other minorities, – who were either born in Macedonia or who had lived there for over 20 years - still did not have the right to Macedonian citizenship. The problem stemmed largely from the legal provision that stipulated that citizenship applicants had to be permanently employed and enjoy a regular salary.

### **Protection of Refugees**

In the first half of 1999, Macedonia faced a huge influx of mainly ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo as a result of massive human rights violations in this Yugoslav province as well as NATO activities. More than 300,000 refugees were accommodated either in refugee camps or in families. The Macedonian government granted temporary humanitarian status to refugees.

Macedonia faced the enormous task of caring for the large number of refugees. Many problems could be attributed to the lack of resources and the failure of the international community to act promptly to help Macedonia. But refugees also reported cases of harassment, violence and intimidation, and restrictions on the right to movement. The authorities closed the borders on several occasions, an act protested by the IHF and the Macedonian Helsinki Committee.<sup>8</sup> The Blace events cast shadows on the government's efforts to tend to the refugees.

- In early April, some 65,000 refugees were trapped between the borders of Macedonia and Kosovo in inhuman conditions, as Macedonian authorities refused access into the country. On 3 April, the authorities

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<sup>8</sup> IHF and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Republic of Macedonia, "Open Letter to President of Macedonia H.E. Kiro Gligorov: Allow Fleeing Kosovo Albanian Refugees Unhindered Entry into Macedonia," 3 April 1999.

forcibly transported them without informing them of their destination and dividing many families. Thousands were transported to Albania.<sup>9</sup>

The international community was slow to provide aid and security for the refugees. Several riots broke out in the camps, partly due to the disorganization of international humanitarian organizations in making transfer lists for refugees to travel to third countries, and the slow pace of transportation. When the war was over and the voluntary repatriation of the Kosovo refugees began, there were still 20,000 registered refugees and about the same number of unregistered refugees in Macedonia.

Following the return of the Albanian refugees to Kosovo, a new flow of Roma and Serb refugees reached Macedonia. Their treatment by the international community, the Macedonian government and the general public drastically changed into negative attitudes and treatment. They were not provided with the same facilities, food, shelter and possibility of transfer to a third country, as had been the case during the first wave of Kosovo Albanian refugees.

- On 22 September, some 1,500 Roma left the refugee camp at Obilic, Kosovo, travelling on foot in the direction of Macedonia. UNHCR officials had reportedly refused them transport. Some 450 Roma arrived at the Macedonian border but were refused entry by Macedonian officials.<sup>10</sup>

As of the end of 1999, the main problem for the remaining Kosovo refugees in Macedonia was how to get appropriate accommodation. Those Macedonians who had no appropriate accommodation themselves objected to the better housing of refugees.

- The residents in Dojran did not agree to accommodate 1,000 Roma refugees. According to them, the “Gypsy” presence would have a negative impact on tourism in the area, increase crime and affect the demographic and ecological balance in the region. The residents in Mavrovo refused to house refugees in the children’s camp of Bunec.

Macedonia agreed to take responsibility for the refugees until 31 March 2000, at which point the Kosovo refugees would be expected to leave the country. The government excluded the possibility of granting these refugees refugee status.

## **Social Rights**

In light of the extremely difficult economic situation, a large number of unemployed persons took action to realize their social rights. Their situation stemmed partly from the bankruptcy of enterprises and a small number of vacancies. The number of families living on social benefits as a last resort was increasing rapidly. As the state was unable to pay sufficient sums of money to support such families, many of them were relieved from paying water bills. In addition, they received humanitarian assistance from the Red Cross.

Many others were formally permanently employed but did not receive their salaries for months and could not enjoy the pensions or social benefits they were entitled to because their employers had failed to pay their contributions to the necessary insurance companies. The health insurance fund was not able to provide the necessary medication to individuals on a regular basis because of a shortage of funds. Those who could afford payment for their medication had difficulties getting reimbursed.

Farmers faced difficulties in the realization of their right to pension to which they had paid their contributions according to article 19(2) and article 39 of the law on pension insurance for farmers and based in the decisions of municipal tax authorities. This law was in force until January 1989. Later it turned out that the Pension Fund had not recognized the farmers’ contributions because they had not had health insurance during that

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<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia Division, section on Macedonia in the Human Rights Watch World Report 2000.

<sup>10</sup> European Roma Rights Center, letter to Macedonian Minister of Interior Pavle Trajanov, 23 September 1999.

period although they had acquired property during the insurance period. According to article 252(2) of the law on administrative procedure, authorities were not allowed to re-open the cases if the decisions had been passed more than five years earlier.

Military pensioners of the former JNA (Yugoslav National Army) who did not fulfill the conditions set forth by article 2 of the governmental decree of 1992<sup>11</sup> also faced problems in receiving their pensions, even though they were citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, had permanent residence in Macedonia, and fulfilled the conditions for the old age pension. This problem stemmed from unsettled relations between the social security fund and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As a result, they had not received their pensions for years.

### **Labor Rights**

In January 1999, the Helsinki Committee registered more than 160 cases of persons who had received redundancy notices or were appointed to lower-ranked positions in various ministries although they had fulfilled their working obligations. This act violated the law on labor relations and the collective agreement. According to the Helsinki Committee, the real number of unemployed was apparently manifold.

In many cases, school principals were dismissed without reason and without the agreement of the Pedagogical Institute or the School Committee, who are in charge of such issues.

There were also cases in which workers were hired although, on the basis of the so-called systematization decree, no new vacancies were allowed.

When fulfilling posts, employers hired individuals in state administration who did not have the required qualifications and rejected those who did. In all these cases, the persons hired were members of the governmental political parties. Such misconduct led to a great number complaints to the Inspectorate for Labor of the republic and the ombudsman, as well as a growing number of labor conflicts that had to be resolved in court.

### **Women's Rights**

During 1999, no notable improvements took place regarding the situation of women.

The marriage of young girls, particularly of Roma and Albanian origin, remained a problem: 27 percent of all women in Macedonia married between the ages of 15-19. Moreover, over 75 percent of the total number of illiterate persons were women because girls often failed to complete the legally prescribed basic eight-year education.

Men remained politically dominant. The 120 members of parliament included only eight women. In the new coalition government of Lubcho Georgievski, only four out of 27 ministers were women. Furthermore, there were no female mayors in the 123 municipalities in Macedonia and only 6 percent of members of the municipal councils were women. Neither the state (through legal regulations), nor the political parties (through their programs or concrete activities) promoted the better representation of women in leading positions and governmental structures.

According to the "SOS-Phone" and governmental information, violence against women increased, but there was still no system to register such cases. Due to both the absence of a network of units that would intervene in the cases of domestic violence, and to patriarchal traditions, very few women reported, and openly denounced, acts of home violence.

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<sup>11</sup> Official Gazette, No. 33/92.