

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PARTY VMRO DPMNE TOWARDS ITS MEMBERS OF THE MUSLIM FAITH

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Abstract: *Macedonia is living the fourth decade of its independence, building a new political system, different from the previous one. The new political system rests on democratic values, in an age of neoliberal pluralism. The new political system builds a mosaic of multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionalism. Political parties are the key factor within the political system, in which citizens organize and articulate their political participation. It is easier for the Macedonian left, represented by the political party SDSM, to accommodate the new situation as former communists and atheists and to nurture contemporary multiconfessionalism. The challenge is for the right, represented by the VMRO DPMNE political party, which from its establishment to the last Congress of 2021, its first ideological determinant was Christian democracy. Given that Macedonia is a multiethnic and multiconfessional environment, the parties are striving for their representativeness. Election analysis shows that the right is present in environments with Muslim faith. Further in the composition of the parliamentary caucus or mayors, the establishment of citizens with Muslim faith in the VMRO DPMNE party may be observed. It can be assumed that the Christian Democrats have Muslim members. A real sociological challenge is to investigate the attitude of this party towards its members of the Muslim faith, how it approaches and mobilizes them. As well as analyzing Muslim members' attachment to the party, what their motives for membership are, how they are organized within the party, what common beliefs or values they share. An examination of this interrelation may provide the answer, why this party after 30 years of its existence and profiling as a Christian democratic party, at the last Congress in 2021, adopted a doctrine in which it profiled itself as a people's party.*

Keywords: *VMRO DPMNE, Christian democracy, Islam, multiconfessionalism.*

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Introduction

Macedonia, as part of the Balkan region, is a state characterized by a mixed ethnic composition of its population. Ethnic Macedonians constitute the dominant group, while alongside them reside communities belonging to other nations. In terms of religious affiliation, approximately 65% of the population identify as Orthodox Christians, 33% as Muslims, while all other religious groups collectively comprise around 1% of the population. From a historical perspective, the region has long fostered a culture of coexistence. Past challenges tended to mobilize and unite people regardless of ethnic or religious differences. In the more recent history of the country, the two Ilandens are remembered as moments that united the people in their shared aspiration for freedom and independence. Both the struggles against ottoman rule and during the Second world war articulated the collective will to establish an independent state with a republican order. This endeavor represented a political conviction broadly shared across the population, mobilized at the time by military-political formations whose principal goal was armed struggle for the realization of political objectives (Стојчев, 2004).

Today, under the conditions of independence, democracy, and political pluralism, political parties constitute the principal mobilizers of political beliefs and participation among citizens. The roots of pluralism can be traced back to earlier historical experiences. Since the proclamation of independence, the two dominant parties that have governed the state represent the conservative and socialist ideological traditions: the conservative orientation embodied by VMRO-DPMNE, and the socialist by SDSM. The responsibility for building a modern, multiethnic, civic society thus rests primarily in the hands of these two political actors, supplemented by the so-called “albanian bloc” parties and other smaller parties representing the interests of communities beyond the macedonian and albanian populations. While in the early stages certain divergences existed between the right and the left in terms of visions for state organization, today these differences have largely diminished, and both sides converge on the project of constructing a civic society that respects and fosters diversity (Христова, 2011).

For political sociology, a central challenge lies in examining how political participation is aggregated and mobilized in the present context, as well as in uncovering the causal relationships between citizens and parties. The institutionalization of pluralism implies that parties must be present across as broad a segment of the electorate as possible. Their representativeness is built through maximizing citizen support within a state that is both multiethnic and multiconfessional. Against this backdrop, the phenomenon of how parties connect with citizens—whose interests they articulate, the nature of their social determinacy, and related questions—emerges as particularly significant (Lipset, 1960). SDSM, as the successor of the former communist party with its atheist ideological orientation, held a comparative advantage over VMRO-DPMNE in mobilizing support independent of religious affiliation. VMRO-DPMNE, by contrast, initially profiled itself as a national party of the macedonian people, and consequently as a party with dominant or near-exclusive support among the Orthodox population. Notably, at its inception, the party exhibited conceptual inconsistencies. Although in its founding documents it invoked the Ilanden period of the historic VMRO and the *Kruševo Manifesto*, which from a religious perspective espoused a tradition of multiconfessionalism, certain of its policies projected an image that diverged from this essence. This raises the analytical dilemma of how such profiling of the party should be understood, whether as a product of inexperience, a deliberate strategy, or as the result of labeling by political competitors that subsequently shaped public perception.

Today, VMRO-DPMNE presents itself as a people’s party representing the interests of all citizens, irrespective of ethnic or religious identity. This doctrinal and programmatic orientation is materialized through its concrete presence in communities of mixed religious composition, most prominent-

ly among Macedonian muslims and Roma, to a lesser extent among Bosniaks and Turks, and only marginally among Albanians. The party's presence is manifested both through the establishment of formal organizational structures and through electoral support in localities with a significant muslim population. Given that until its most recent Congress in 2021 the party explicitly declared christian democracy among its core ideological commitments, a key question for scholarly inquiry remains how this self-identification has influenced its ability to mobilize members of muslim faith.

1. Multiculturalism within VMRO-DPMNE

When examining the ethnic and religious profile of the political party VMRO-DPMNE, one observes that from its very establishment, and particularly during its first decade of existence, the party developed a certain specificity. This specificity lay in the differentiation between its substantive orientation and the public perception it generated—or, more precisely, in the at times divergent presentation of its priorities, which created shifting public perceptions of its ethnic and religious profile. If one examines the founding documents, it is evident that the party addressed itself to all ethnic and confessional communities. By invoking the *Kruševo Manifesto* as one of the most significant documents of the historical VMRO, thereby establishing a sense of continuity, the party proclaimed its vision of Macedonia as a multiethnic and multiconfessional state. The *Political Platform of the Initiative Committee for the Establishment of VMRO-DPMNE*, published on 20 January 1990, emphasized “The Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity is the expression of the revolutionary aspirations of the macedonian people, which came to the fore in 1903, when the first republic in the Balkans was established in Kruševo, whose historical manifesto proclaimed the brotherhood of the peoples of Macedonia” (Синадиновски, 2012).

Similarly, the *Manifesto* published on the same date articulated a vision for the future state order, stating “In its maximum program, it envisages the realization of the centuries-old macedonian ideal of a free and united Macedonia, an independent state of the Macedonian people and of all other nationalities inhabiting Macedonia, united on an equal basis in a macedonian formation, similar to democratic Switzerland” (ibid., 2012). In the *Proclamation on the Establishment of the Party*, adopted at the founding assembly on 17 June 1990, a section explicitly addressed other ethnic groups alongside the macedonian people “Albanians, Turks, Roma, Vlachs and other nationalities of Macedonia, you too are children of the Macedonian land. You too have the right to free national development and democratic life. Macedonia is also your homeland. Its future is equally significant for you. VMRO-DPMNE is loyal to the Ilinden Manifesto of 1903 and stands for brotherhood and equality among all the nationalities of Macedonia. For this reason, join VMRO-DPMNE, which follows its own macedonian path and will not lead you into the jaws of the balkan imperialists” (ibid., 2012).

Viewed from this perspective, and considering these key founding documents, the party unequivocally presented itself as a political force open to mobilizing and organizing members and supporters from all religions, not confined to a single faith community. However, another perspective reveals the contradictions noted at the outset. In its *Electoral Program* proclaimed on 18 October 1990, a section dedicated to the macedonian church, under the title *The Relationship with the Macedonian church*, stated “VMRO-DPMNE believes that the macedonian church should be entirely independent, fully autonomous from the regime of the macedonian state. We are aware that the macedonian church represents the macedonian nation and the macedonian state. VMRO-DPMNE will regard the Church as an exceptionally important national institution which it will support.” This explicit position on the importance of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric, and its identification with the nation, while omitting any mention of other religions, effectively branded the party at its inception as an exclusively Christian, specifically Orthodox, political actor. This per-

ception was reinforced by the participation of clergy from the Macedonian Orthodox Church, led by Metropolitan Petar, who delivered welcoming addresses at the party's First Congress held in Prilep on 6–7 April 1991. The culmination of this identification occurred with the adoption of the party's Statute at the same Congress, where article 41 in the section *Special Provisions* explicitly stipulated "In the event of the dissolution of the organization, the property of the Party shall pass into the ownership of the Macedonian Orthodox Church." Shortly thereafter, this alignment was further underscored by the announcement that the party had proposed Bishop (later Archbishop) Mihail as its candidate for President of the Republic.

From today's perspective, these contradictions may be understood as a reflection of the party's early struggle to reconcile its proclaimed vision of Macedonia as a multiethnic and multiconfessional state with its pronounced privileging of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. This dominance was, to an extent, expected given the demographic prevalence of the Orthodox population. Nevertheless, the element of multiethnicity would have been more complete had the party, alongside its emphasis on the Orthodox church, also explicitly acknowledged other religions—particularly Islam, as the country's second largest faith. This initial religious profiling coincided with its ethnic profiling as a national party of ethnic macedonians, driven by the overriding political priority of establishing an independent macedonian state. This orientation characterized VMRO-DPMNE until the leadership of Nikola Gruevski in 2003, with the notable exception of President of the Republic Boris Trajkovski (1999–2004), a party member and adherent of the Evangelical-Methodist Church. Trajkovski was the first VMRO-DPMNE official to openly advocate for a civic society, highlighting its multiethnic and multiconfessional character. His religious affiliation and personal convictions distinguished him from other party officials and contributed to his broader acceptance among muslims. Symbolically, he was the first party functionary to be photographed participating in prayer at a mosque.

Under Gruevski's leadership (2003–2017), the party embarked on a process of rebranding, aimed primarily at broadening its electoral base to secure electoral victory. One of the earliest measures was the removal from the Statute of the provision stipulating that, in the event of dissolution, party property would be transferred to the Macedonian Orthodox Church—signaling a move away from exclusive identification with that religious community. Parallel to this rebranding, the party undertook a comprehensive renewal of its organizational structures at both urban and rural levels, with the ambition of penetrating areas where it had previously lacked presence, particularly localities with mixed ethnic and confessional populations, or where muslim populations predominated. Naturally, the party first sought to establish itself among Macedonian Muslims, where its new approach could be more readily explained than in other communities such as Albanians or Turks. In addition to this "breakthrough" among Macedonian muslims, VMRO-DPMNE also consolidated itself in areas with Roma populations, likewise largely Muslim. To this day, the party's outreach to muslim communities has been concentrated primarily in these two constituencies, with only limited inroads into other ethnic groups.

A positive effect on attracting and mobilizing muslim members and supporters was also generated by the party's shift from a national to a civic profile. The earlier image of VMRO-DPMNE as a national party was replaced, during Gruevski's leadership, by frequent use of terms such as "civic right" or "modern people's party of the civic right." For the first time in its existence, VMRO-DPMNE began organizing iftar dinners during Ramadan for its muslim members, signaling recognition of their religious traditions. The reception of these events among muslim members was overwhelmingly positive, as evidenced by their widespread publicization on social media. The party itself also promoted these events to the broader public, thereby shaping a new public perception of itself and expanding its mobilizing capacity. Importantly, the inclusion of muslim members also extended into the highest party organs. In previous years, the Executive Committee included prominent muslim members such

as Fatmir Imeroski, Alim Bilali, Nola Ismailovska, Nermin Telovska, and Zekir Ramčilović (vmro.dpmne.org.mk).

The leadership of Hristijan Mickoski has continued this trajectory of mobilizing members of muslim faith. This is evident in the party's official documents, personnel policies, and practices at the local level. The Statute published on the party's website lists among its primary goals and tasks the "guaranteeing and respecting of human and civil freedoms and rights and the equality of people in their enjoyment," as well as the "respect for the rights of ethnic communities." At the same time, however, the Statute reinstates the provision that, in the event of dissolution, party property would transfer to the Macedonian Orthodox Church–Ohrid Archbishopric (now, article 82). The *Doctrine of the Party* defines Macedonia as a "harmonious union of all peoples, cultures, and values that function within it," while its *Fundamental Values* declare: "VMRO-DPMNE addresses all people, groups, communities, and religions in Macedonia," and affirm "freedom of expression and respect for diverse beliefs and religious worldviews." The party's discourse on multiethnicity and multiconfessionalism is framed within a new doctrine of "Shared Patriotism," envisioned as the future of the country. Its electoral programs likewise continue to proclaim policies of coexistence, tolerance, and the nurturing of cultural values across all communities (vmro.dpmne.org.mk). In line with this orientation, muslim members remain represented in the party's leadership, including, at present, Dr. Mehmet Xhaferi in the Executive Committee. The tradition of hosting iftar dinners with muslim members has also been maintained.

2. Electoral support for VMRO-DPMNE in areas with a predominantly muslim population

In the preceding chapter, *Multiculturalism within VMRO-DPMNE*, the analysis emphasized the most significant elements, policies, and figures associated with the party's approach to multiculturalism across different periods of its existence. The following section elaborates on how these policies and individuals have exerted a mobilizing effect among citizens residing in areas with a predominantly muslim population, bearing in mind that the mobilization of electoral support represents the very essence of party activity. The challenge in this case is particularly pronounced, given that during a certain period the party, alongside its designation as a national and conservative formation, explicitly identified itself as christian democratic. The implications of such a christian democratic profile on the electoral preferences of muslim citizens can be most clearly discerned through an analysis of votes garnered in municipalities with a significant muslim population. The present analysis of VMRO-DPMNE's electoral support therefore focuses on selected municipalities within the country characterized by a substantial muslim demographic, namely:

- Tetovo
- Gostivar
- Kichevo
- Struga
- Debar
- Plasnica
- Mavrovo-Rostushe
- Dolneni
- Centar Zupa

Table 1. Electoral support for VMRO-DPMNE in parliamentary elections across electoral years

Municipality	1998	2002	2006	2008	2011	2014	2016	2020	2024
Tetovo	2,641	2,283	4,115	5,180	6,424	7,812	7,823	9,063	10,882
Gostivar	3,982	3,422	5,960	7,021	8,365	9,951	9,976	11,641	13,965
Kichevo	4,322	3,950	6,823	7,940	9,280	10,865	10,923	12,440	14,887
Struga	5,423	4,951	8,210	9,862	11,541	13,420	13,865	15,389	18,481
Debar	1,121	946	1,482	2,110	2,487	2,954	3,017	3,510	4,180
Plasnica	312	285	460	720	861	1,127	1,327	1,321	1,568
Mavrovo-Rostushe	1,120	980	1,645	2,086	2,541	3,010	3,423	3,544	4,220
Dolneni	1,563	1240	2,010	2,463	2,927	3,486	3,313	4,060	4,881
Centar Zupa	498	451	710	1,041	1,320	1,683	1,594	1,985	2,340

Data Source: State Election Commission

Figure 1. Graphical Illustration of VMRO-DPMNE votes across municipalities and electoral years in parliamentary election

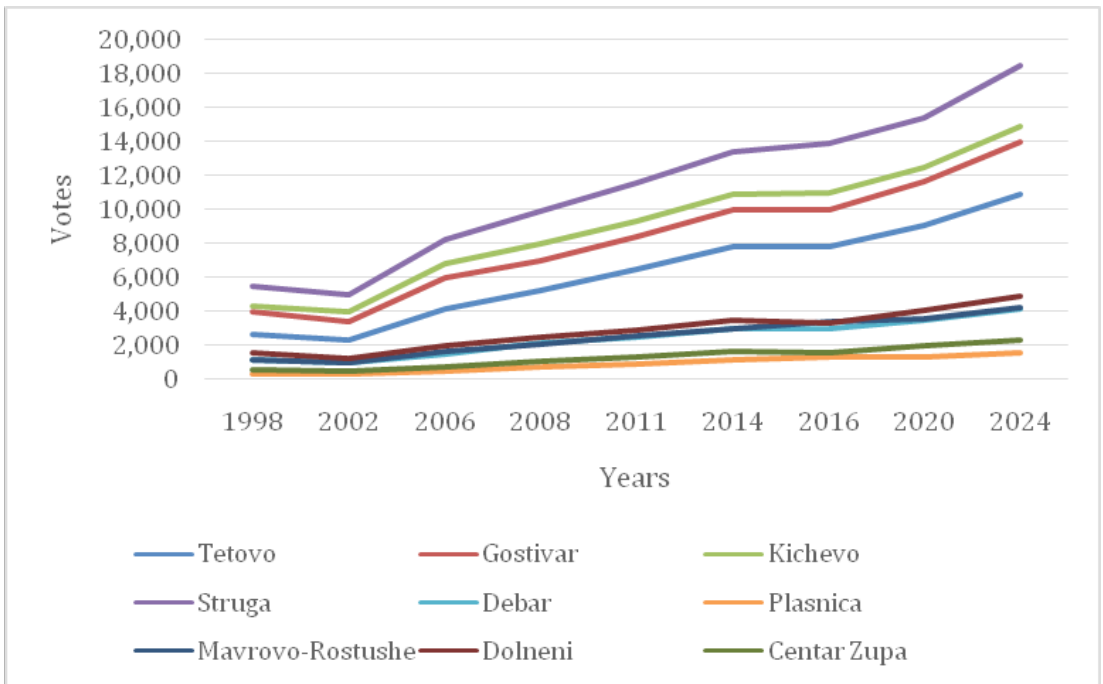
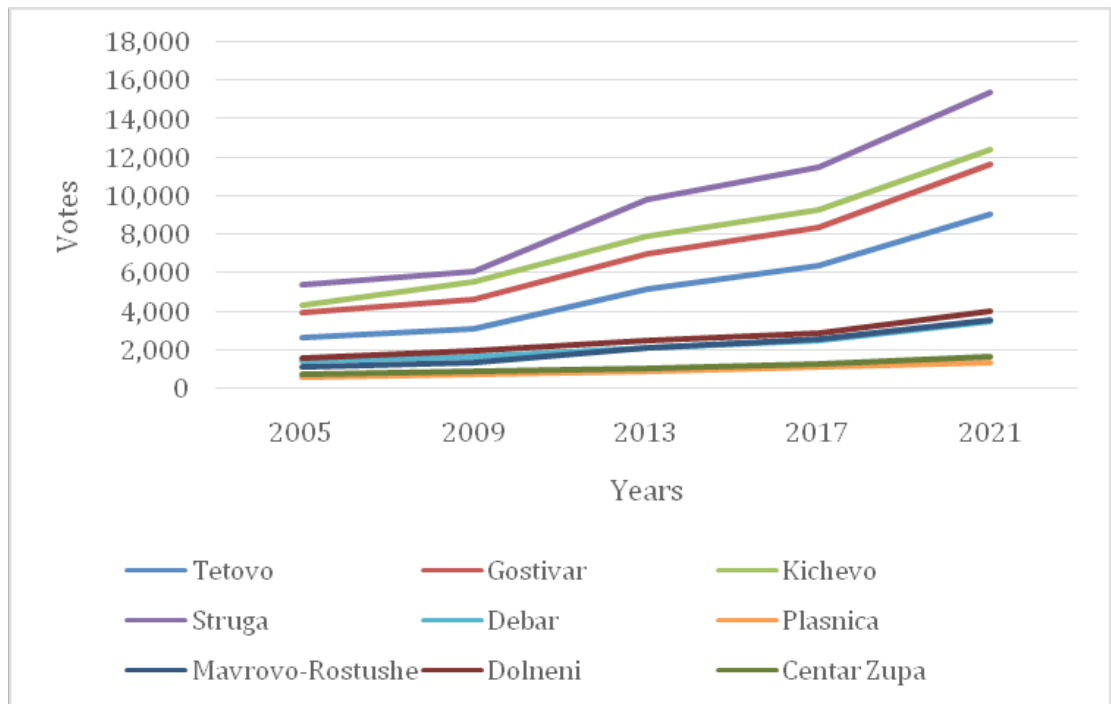


Table 2. Electoral support for VMRO-DPMNE across local elections by years

Municipality	2005	2009	2013	2017	2021
Tetovo	2,640	3,120	5,187	6,421	9,062
Gostivar	3,981	4,667	7,020	8,363	11,640
Kichevo	4,320	5,580	7,943	9,284	12,441
Struga	5,423	6,125	9,861	11,540	15,383
Debar	1,420	1,680	2,111	2,487	3,510
Plasnica	581	720	863	1,120	1,325
Mavrovo-Rostushe	1,123	1,361	2,081	2,543	3,541
Dolneni	1,561	1,922	2,463	2,925	4,062
Centar Zupa	725	861	1,040	1,323	1,683

Data Source: State Election Commission

Figure 2. Graphical Illustration of VMRO-DPMNE votes across municipalities and electoral years in local elections

Analyses of the electoral performance of VMRO-DPMNE in municipalities with a predominantly muslim population demonstrate a clear correlation with the earlier elaboration on the evolution of multiculturalism within the party. Particularly when examined through graphical representations, an upward trend in the mobilization of support for the party becomes evident. This confirms the strong link between party policies and the electorate, while also underscoring the extent to which public perception of a political party influences voter orientation. The initial profile of VMRO-DPMNE,

characterized by its close association with the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) and its self-identification as a national party of ethnic Macedonians—had a negative impact on the party's ability to attract muslim adherents. However, the rebranding of the party as a formation open to all citizens, commonly framed as the "civic right," coupled with a certain relaxation of its ties to the MOC, contributed significantly to the mobilization of a larger number of muslim supporters. The personal engagement of specific party officials—such as attending prayers in mosques, meeting with citizens in predominantly muslim areas, initiating projects of direct interest to these communities, and organizing iftar dinners for muslim members—further reshaped the image of VMRO-DPMNE into that of a party equally attentive to the needs of citizens regardless of their religious affiliation. Electoral results indicate that these messages were received and understood by the electorate, which responded with a corresponding positive shift in its electoral orientation toward the party.

The electoral support of muslim citizens has translated into concrete political victories for VMRO-DPMNE in both parliamentary and local elections in municipalities with significant muslim populations. The party has nominated muslim members to occupy positions at both the local and national levels. The first muslim mayor from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE was Mukrem Memeti, who was elected mayor of the Municipality of Mavrovo-Rostuše in the 2009 local elections. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the party nominated Alim Bilali, who was subsequently elected as a member of Parliament. In the following 2016 elections, two additional muslim representatives—Nola Ismajlovska and Zekir Ramčilović—were elected as MPs from VMRO-DPMNE. In the years since, the party has continued to field muslim candidates for both parliamentary and mayoral positions. While not all were ultimately successful in securing electoral mandates, many nevertheless achieved considerable electoral support. In the ongoing local elections, VMRO-DPMNE has once again nominated a candidate of muslim faith, Oner Jakupovski, for mayor of the Municipality of Mavrovo-Rostuše, while also placing muslim candidates as lead nominees on councilor lists in the municipalities of Debar, Mavrovo-Rostuše, and Bogovinje.

3. VMRO-DPMNE in the perception of its muslim members

For the purposes of this research, a short survey questionnaire was formulated and answered by fifty members of VMRO-DPMNE of muslim faith. Respondents were drawn from the City of Skopje, as well as the municipalities of Mavrovo-Rostuše and Struga. The administration of the questionnaire was facilitated through the assistance of former mayors, members of parliament, and activists of VMRO-DPMNE of muslim faith from the aforementioned municipalities. Since the number of party members fluctuates and is not publicly disclosed, unofficial estimates place VMRO-DPMNE's membership between 50,000 and 70,000. The share of muslim members is presumed not to exceed 10 percent. Within this context, a sample of fifty respondents constitutes a sufficiently representative basis for capturing the perceptions of muslim members regarding their party affiliation with VMRO-DPMNE.

The questionnaire consisted of the following questions:

1. Before joining VMRO-DPMNE, were you familiar with its programmatic orientations?
2. What motivated you to join VMRO-DPMNE?
3. In your opinion, does religious affiliation influence opportunities and prospects within the party?
4. How would you assess VMRO-DPMNE's commitment to multiculturalism?
5. In your view, how do muslims perceive VMRO-DPMNE?
6. Can a multiethnic society be built through monoethnic parties?

The structured responses yielded fundamental insights into how muslims perceive VMRO-DPMNE, their motivations for political participation in this particular party, and their experience with regard to whether religious affiliation influences everyday party engagement. The survey also tested broader public perceptions of the party and explored the so-called macedonian paradox: the existence of monoethnic parties operating within a multiethnic society. With respect to the first question, which tested awareness of VMRO-DPMNE's programmatic principles prior to membership, thus touching on the issue of conscious choice 81 percent responded affirmatively, stating they were familiar with the party's platform and functioning. Eleven percent were partially informed, and 8 percent were not informed at all. These results suggest that party membership is predominantly based on prior knowledge of programmatic orientations. Moreover, the reasons provided confirm that membership was a conscious political decision, often rooted in shared or aligned ideological views.

The second question, concerning motivation for party engagement, yielded a more diverse range of responses grouped into several categories. The largest group (63 percent) linked their motivation to VMRO-DPMNE's stance on an independent and sovereign Macedonia, frequently describing it as the "most macedonian party." This is partly explained by the fact that most respondents identified as Macedonian muslims, with smaller numbers identifying as Gorani, Torbeši, and others. The second-largest group (17 percent) cited the party's programmatic orientations as their primary motivation. A third group (15 percent) emphasized the desire to influence state and local policies through political activism, contributing to the development of both the state and local community. A fourth group (10 percent) highlighted the preservation of national identity as Macedonian muslims, in contrast to pressures to identify as Turks, Albanians, or other ethnic groups. A smaller group (6 percent) associated their motivation with the leadership of Nikola Gruevski as party leader and Prime Minister. The remaining 4 percent provided varied answers, ranging from the appeal of the party's traditional values, to personal networks ("my relatives were involved in VMRO-DPMNE"), or pragmatic considerations such as employment opportunities.

Responses to the third question, concerning the influence of religious affiliation on intra-party success, fell largely into two categories. A dominant 74 percent of respondents believed that religious affiliation does indeed play a role in determining success within VMRO-DPMNE. By contrast, 26 percent argued that personal competence and individual engagement matter more, and that religious affiliation does not significantly affect career advancement within the party. However, within the majority group's responses, a sense of resignation emerged while the party officially proclaims equal opportunities for all members, many believe that absolute equality has not yet been achieved. Some pointed to unequal representation in the party's highest bodies or in executive governance as evidence. Others attributed the problem not to the party as an institution but to the attitudes of certain individuals or groups who fail to perceive their muslim co-members as equals.

Regarding the fourth question, how VMRO-DPMNE nurtures multiculturalism, all respondents (100 percent) stated that the party promotes policies aimed at preserving the multicultural elements of society. Differences were expressed only in nuance: some felt the party indeed supports multiculturalism but communicates it ineffectively to the public, while others believed that although multiculturalism is nurtured, the efforts remain insufficient, calling for a clearer strategic framework.

On the fifth question, concerning the broader muslim perception of VMRO-DPMNE, a striking 86 percent stated that muslims generally view the party as the national party of christian Macedonians. This result correlates with earlier findings on perceived inequality based on religious affiliation. Many pointed to frequent joint appearances of party officials with representatives of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC), interpreting these as evidence of a closer relationship with orthodox christianity. Some respondents linked this perception to the larger number of significant holidays in the orthodox calendar compared to the Islamic one, which amplifies public visibility. Others emphasized that the party pays comparatively little attention to Muslim communities, thereby reinforcing its im-

age as a christian party. By contrast, 14 percent of respondents highlighted that the party's policies toward Macedonians in general also encompass Macedonian muslims, stressing the idea of national unity as central to their perception of VMRO-DPMNE.

Finally, on the sixth question, whether a multiethnic society can be built through monoethnic parties, an overwhelming 96 percent rejected the notion, arguing that monoethnic or monoc confessional parties cannot create an inclusive society. They emphasized the need for a cohesive society where communities live with one another rather than merely alongside each other. The presence of nationalism in certain political messages was described as a regressive phenomenon. Respondents called for reform of party politics along ideological rather than ethnic or religious lines, envisioning a future with fewer, but genuinely multiethnic and ideologically profiled parties. Only 4 percent expressed the view that monoethnic parties could still contribute to building a multiethnic society, provided that their policies are based on coexistence, tolerance, and cooperation.

Conclusion

Since its inception, the political party VMRO-DPMNE has consistently sought to mobilize electoral support from citizens irrespective of their religious affiliation. However, its success in cultivating trust among the muslim population of the state has varied across different historical periods. In the first decade of political pluralism, the dominant public perception of the party was that of a national political organization representing ethnic Macedonians of christian denomination. Although its official programmatic orientation emphasized the vision of a multiethnic society, the party's discourse on patriotism was predominantly framed through, and closely aligned with, the christian tradition. The earliest instances of participation by muslim citizens within VMRO-DPMNE came primarily from Macedonian muslims, who perceived the party as a political actor committed to the project of state independence. For this group, ethnic identification with the macedonian nation prevailed over religious belonging, with Islamic affiliation assuming a secondary role functioning primarily as a marker of differentiation from the rest of the Macedonian population, which was largely christian. Guided by its ideological premise of national unity, VMRO-DPMNE initially established its organizational structures within non-christian constituencies in localities inhabited by Macedonian muslims.

This period was followed by a phase in which the party began to shift from a national, right-oriented formation toward what could be described as a civic-oriented right. The civic concept, as a mode of political engagement within VMRO-DPMNE, was first introduced and actively promoted by then-President of the Republic, Boris Trajkovski. Through his political messages as well as his actions, Trajkovski contributed to reshaping the public perception that VMRO-DPMNE was exclusively attentive to the interests of christians. With the ascension of Nikola Gruevski to the leadership of the party, Trajkovski's approach toward other confessional communities was transformed into official party policy. The party undertook a series of measures designed to build closer ties with muslims. Muslim representatives were integrated into the party's highest decision-making bodies and organs. At both local and parliamentary elections, VMRO-DPMNE fielded muslim candidates, resulting in the election of muslim mayors and members of parliament. In an effort to further strengthen its connection with muslim constituents and to mobilize new membership, the party began organizing iftar dinners, signaling that alongside christian holidays it also acknowledged and celebrated the religious traditions of its muslim members.

At present, VMRO-DPMNE continues to mobilize support among citizens of muslim faith, maintaining longstanding modes of communication and organizational practices within these communities. The party's entrenchment among Muslim populations is particularly pronounced among Macedonian muslims, Roma, Gorani, and Torbeši, while it remains comparatively less significant

among other muslim ethnic groups such as Bosniaks, Turks, and Albanians. VMRO-DPMNE incorporates muslim members into its governing structures and nominates them for public office. Muslim party members consciously and with awareness of the party's policies choose to align themselves with VMRO-DPMNE. Their prevailing perception is that the party endorses multiculturalism, though it does not sufficiently project this orientation in the public sphere. Consequently, skepticism persists among segments of the muslim community regarding the extent to which the party values its members equally, irrespective of religious affiliation. Nonetheless, muslim members of VMRO-DPMNE are convinced that the future trajectory of political organization in the country lies in the direction of civic, multiethnic parties, as opposed to the currently predominant monoethnic ones, particularly in view of the multiethnic composition of the broader society.

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