The Politics and Marketing of Transition : Macedonian Parliamentary Elections 2002

JULIJANA MLADENOVSKA analyses the Macedonian elections of 2002, and concludes that few parties went to the people with concrete messages. It would be better for the parties in Macedonia to attempt to meet the real needs of the voters. The Macedonian citizen, regardless of his ethnic background and his/her fears related to the violent conflicts and an uncertain future, is growing to be a serious critic of the groups and individuals leading Macedonian political life. It is time for a more responsible and honest political leadership.

Introduction

Do you notice how towns change during times of elections? Do you ever wonder whether aliens have attacked your town after election day when you are stared at by distorted two-third faces with only half an eye talking in a weird 'soap' advertising language composed of "*Want...*", "*...clean hands...*", "*...tomorrow*"?

One of the favourite topics of philosophers concerns the nature of reality. What is *real*, they question. The essence or the form of the things we see? To what extent does form reflect essence? Does the essence suffer change when the form is changed? Getting back to the first example, the question arises is the billboard-politician with one part of a face any better than the one I know with a whole face? According to Berkley and alike, the true existence of the things is confirmed only through my perceptual capacity, so as long as I *percipi* them (and they are the object of my perception) they exist. If I play with this view even more, I can say that I *am* what I am, not because I am aware of that, for the others confirm it to me, since I see the reflections of my self in the eyes of the others, in their behaviour towards me. They are confirmation that I take certain amount of space and time, and have distinguishable shape and essence, and name attached to it, and all of those things make my existence real. Heidegger plays with these thoughts too. He says that what appears in front of us, the *phenomenon* (as the reality of the things), and its true nature is in the *showing*, the *re-presenting* aspect. The phenomenon *is* by being the one that re-presents itself, and this is its nature, its true self. The vulgar meaning of the phenomenon can in this case be the deception, the illusion, the re-presentation that is a non-presentation, an emptiness that wants to confirm its false existence by attempting to be a phenomenon.

The billboards, the pictures with funny, smiling faces of our tired, grumpy and boring politicians are to be seen in the context of the above introduction. They aim to assure us that the people we see have an essence through the form they display. The eyes looking at the future, the hand pointing to us, the message that captures a line to add the context and give a drop of truth to the *phenomenon* that strives for its true self. Through a variety of codes, the image-creators are seeking for mechanisms that will convince the voters that the politicians are *more* than the bare promise and above all, that they are *real*. They use the appearance, the phenomenon, to expose the essence and assure the existence. They combine the codes of transmission, such as the media, and especially the TV, and the billboards, the photos, the symbols, the messages, with the codes of recognition: this *is* the leader, this *is* the party. The tonal codes: nation, ethnic group, country, historical link; with the iconic ones: the face, the eyes, the smile, the hands. The codes of taste and sensibility, rhetorical codes that repeat the names one should vote for; and many others mostly linked to our unconsciousness. This presentation will actually question something that might seem as quite a disputable issue: whether politics can be improved by more and not less marketing (Scammell, 2002). The main argument behind this attempt is not to say that the politics needs to be polished and improve its form / appearance by applying established marketing techniques, since all the essence is there and is crying out to be exposed. On the contrary. The parties in US, Europe and Macedonia to some extent, appear to be already "highly professional market-oriented organisations geared to the needs of virtually permanent campaigning" (Scammell) as if the marketing makes the

essence they long for! On the other hand, political marketing is deeply implicated in the current concerns of democracy, considered a key contributor to the "crisis of public communication" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) and to public cynicism. Marketing is more commonly seen as a problem rather than the solution to citizens' disengagement.

I do not want this article to be understood as a plea for more of the same spin and manufactured imaginery that is so characteristic of contemporary political communications. Rather the reverse. The usual political propaganda in Macedonia is ugly, resembling perhaps its content.

 It seems that the mainstream political rhetoric is locked in a time warp fitting the mass society tendency to polarise, simplify, repeat the message, personify and vilify the enemy. In almost all cases, regardless of the political and ethnic (which in the case of Macedonia is particularly applicable) background of the parties, they all use the same pattern that says – vote for me, because my opponent is *more* corrupt, *less* trustworthy, *less* competent, made a *worse* mess.

This negative campaigning is a predominant trend in the political communications of the last 10 years, and it seems that the parties and politicians, to the extent that they practice marketing, seem to rely on a model of product and promotion that has little to do with citizen-consumer relationship-marketing concept.

Arising for the summary above, some key concerns are:
- Do the parties know what they want to achieve and how (apart from the standard utility approach expressed in high percentage of voters = victory)?
- Are marketing agencies skilful to deliver the needs and satisfy the goals (the political and PR capacities are considered to be somewhat weak and leaning too much on the improvisations)?
- Are consumers empowered enough to be selective and critical in their understanding of the messages (though being constantly treated as a crowd that is easy to manipulate through different modes of propaganda)?
- And finally, is the new claim of "powerful consumers" any more believable than the old customer king-mantra offering the illusion of markets organised in the consumer interest while always serving the end of profit?

SYMBOLS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The politics of entire peoples are expressed and manipulated through the imponderables that float in cloth at the end of the pole, as was vividly illustrated with the end of the regimes in Eastern Europe. Day after day, between 1989 and 1991 the world's media captured crowds in one eastern and south-eastern capital after another, ecstatically displaying their country's flags having removed some of the previous signs of 'belonging' (such as the symbols of a hammer and stickle.)

Symbols help citizens feel part of the same political community, serving as tools for identifying with each other and conceptualising themselves as nationals. To use the Benedict Anderson' phrase, symbols play a role in the formation of the "imagined communities" and consolidation of the nation state. Symbols can "produce and

reproduce national narratives in forms authorised by the state" (Pointon) or at least by a particular group. The inevitable elements are, of course, portraits of national heroes as well as depiction of historical events, and most importantly, evoking the ideas of liberty and justice.

> - ***Symbols as a view of the essence of the group, tools for collective identity and mechanisms to assist the process of distinguishing the "self" from the "others"***
> - ***Symbols are usually highly abstract rather than manifest and concrete***
> - ***Trust is the important category at stake – a symbol means a promise by the group to back up the shared values***
> - ***Symbols are also part of the social relation between individuals and groups***

Following Anthony Giddens we can also say that creation of certain symbols is a mechanism more asserted to modernity since they "bracket time and space... between individuals who would never physically meet one another" (Giddens). Mircea Eliade on the other hand analyses the rituals and symbols used by the ancient peoples around the world showing the usage of powerful and supra-natural stories to back the power desires. The myths were created to explain the necessity, certainty, the unavoidable determinism that gives the ultimate answer to almost all disputable issues, such as the right to power, the life and death, the good and the evil, the self and the world. The rituals, in this context, are related to the religious experience that brings back to life the distant, ecstatic and important events as a vivid reality, where the appearance of the myth serves as a link between the desire to seize the power (getting to the throne as regresus ad uterum – the return to the mystical first birth) and renewing the world and offering the new beginning, collective return of the group (through one selected representative) that will bring back the times of glory and "recover" the good life. The modern democracies' representative figures use similar patterns. The so-called "ostentatious attitudes" in our world are expressed through the appropriation of the finest goods but also through the ceremonial, the most refined manners, physical appearance and display of an entourage. Some of the observed trends show that in 1889, the selected class representatives tended to be merely the sample of their group where the representative was the living symbol of the collective identity. Latter on the trend changed and the representatives were to show that one is close enough to those s/he represents but also able to understand the specific problems and demands of the similar/close groups as well. The specialists in political advertising stress for example that it is relatively easy to centre the communication campaign on the candidate (this is to say an image of "I") or those s/he wishes to personify – a target clientele or a population range (i.e. a "You" image). On the other hand, it seems more delicate to effectively propose the "We" image, this is to say "I and You" on a single poster. Many of them agree that this is due to the difficult linkage between the two categories of symbols. Generally speaking people tend to choose the person who best embodies the ideals of the group represented.

SYMBOLS-MARKETING-POLITICS

The political representation, combining the use of symbols, marketing and politics, has several meanings. Parallel to its classic usage meaning the <u>delegation of power to those designated to act as spokespeople and defend group interests</u> (strongly favoured by political scientists), the term equally relates to <u>mental perceptions</u> (perceptions as representations of reality) and to the <u>theatrical stage</u>. For this text I would keep to the

understanding of representation by Pierre Bourdieu (see: J-P Daloz, Elites et representation politiques, 2002) where the main notion is related to the aspect of representative projecting his/her own image to the represented group which in turn influences the way s/he acts as a group's incarnation. Jean-Pascal Daloz analyses what he calls "the main interest of the Bourdieu School" or "the symbolic trick of representation" which consists in representatives practically creating the collective group which they intend to make exist by proclaiming themselves as its representatives. In this context he states that representation is linked to the phenomenon of appearance (going back to Heidegger), and especially the appearance in public, the particular behaviour of political actors when they take up the role in front of the audience where all three elements conjoin "interdependently": the mental (cultural, social), the vicarious and the theatrical. In the modern democracies any politician has to be simultaneously "one of us" (that is not cutting her/himself off from those they represent) and at the same time, above the average person to show that s/he is eminent enough to be a suitable representative with respect to those representing other groups of interests.

To refer back to Daloz, "representation of distinction" and "representation of likeness" that need to be resorted to at the same time, superiority and equality, proximity and distance, often seem contradictory but need to be combined. During the election period especially, it is a question of being noticed and convincing the future constituents that one's qualities will be useful for their cause and interests. The representative may, to some extend be inclined to give the impression that s/he is extraordinary and this may go as far as "heroisation" and the assertion of being able to master one's environment and the power relations benefiting those represented. When this logic is called for, it is necessary to clearly differentiate between the superiority based on competence (superiority on a rational level, taking into account merits and efficiency), social background (distinction resulting from upper class that is difficult to highlight especially if one intends to represent lower classes) and the external signs that are more related to the symbols.

Political campaigns devote much of their attention to trying to discover what issues or symbols evoke an emotional response that is what hits voters' so called "hot button". The assumption is that the voting is the matter of the hearth, what you feel about someone rather than a matter of the mind, since the mind takes what the hearth feels and makes an interpretation (Diamond and Bats). Two experiments provide examples in favour of this thesis. They demonstrate that pairing nonsense categories with in-group designators such as "we" or "ours" led to more favourable evaluations than did pairing of the same with "they" or "theirs" as out-group designators. In another experiment, Americans responded more negatively to foreign than to American leaders when shown TV clips without audio tracks. Interestingly enough, this negative response to foreign leaders disappeared once the audio information was supplied, suggesting that the negative effects were an immediate, primary and non-cognitive response to the leaders' foreignness. Humans often are immensely emotionally involved in remote and abstract political events with only modest direct personal cost and benefit. The main triggers to create an emotional affect to certain (political) act / message etc., is via the political symbols that are mainly used to evoke and mobilise human emotions. *People* can also serve as powerful symbols: Jesus hanging on the cross, revolutionary symbols such as Lenin, Castro, Che Guevara...; they can also

symbolise social evil, such as Hitler or Nero, or the supposed villainy of Saddam Hussein that stimulated widespread support for something that had little apparent connection to the American interests.

GOOD GUYS-BAD GUYS

Symbols are particularly useful for distinguishing the bad guys from the good guys, and we have "good Macedonians", "honest working class people", "the tax-payers", "senior citizens", than "evil terrorists", "seductive religions"... When presented to us, the symbols rivet our attention and evoke strong emotions. These emotions are dominated by the simple good-bad, like-dislike evaluative dimensions having variety of more specific forms beyond that. Just naming the negative emotions as an example: hatred is not too extreme a word for the emotions behind hate-based crimes and the most extreme cases of xenophobia (Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, etc.) Some mixture between shame and rage may lie behind the most violent of these forms. Anger is the most appropriate label for emotions associated with the anti-governmental affects, for popular movements, racist leaders. Fear also seems easy to motivate minorities, but also majorities under threat of loosing their powers with the new legal provisions granting more rights to the minority groups. Disgust has perhaps accompanied racial prejudices and ethnocentric theories that are anti-Gypsy, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, etc. One can add that as a result, the symbolic process is characterised by rather unthinking, reflexive, affective responses to remote attitude objects, rather than by calculation on probable costs and benefits (whereas personal or not). This process is based on, the so-called internal processing that interprets rather unconsciously the symbols activating the "symbolic predisposition" process. The symbolic predispositions are said to be acquired relatively early in life. Extensive research on political socialisation has investigated children and adolescent early affective responses to such symbols as the flag, the president, stigmatised ethnic / racial groups and political parties (Easton and Dennis, or Katz, etc.) This early learning presumably yields such predispositions as (latter) party identification, racial prejudices, ethnic identities, basic values, nationalism, and attachment to various symbols of the nation and regimes. Researchers analysed whether these early predispositions persist through life – the early researchers (1960ties) on political socialisation believed that childhood and early adolescence were formative and pinpointed late adolescence as a critical period to the acquisition of lasting attitudes. The so-called revisionist theorists (theories from the latter period, 1980ties) in contrast hold that short-term forces continue to influence symbolic predispositions such as party identification through adulthood. Latter extensive researches indicated support for both the "persistence" and the "impressionable years" viewpoints (1990ties). The symbolic predispositions can be evoked by political symbols – they can be identified by several criteria, among which are: (a) that of all individual attitudes they are the most stable over time (viable); (b) yield the most consistent responses over similar attitude objects (constraint); and (c) have the most influence on attitudes toward objects (power). There are many additional processes linked to the predispositions: the on-line processing, memory-based evaluation, symbolic and category-based processing, etc. A viewer exposed to time pressure, limited attention and limited cognitive resources in general promote the category-based processing – people usually do not have a great deal of political information, nor pay close attention to the political media even though television is omnipresent in our society.

Information usually receives diffused and distracted attention from the public and that is particularly true of political messages.

IMPRESSIONS

The main practical decisions voters must make are choices between candidates which require impressions of the rivals too – this is the focal point of much of the mass political conversation in a sense of "*What do you think about X*?" One of the main aims of the political ads is defined by Graham Singleton branding expert at Value Engineers (UK) by saying "Political ads are just as likely to backfire as win over voters". Inasmuch we might have doubts, the advertising is considered to have an effect, though to have the right, positive effect the political campaign also need the right 'creative' and needs to say "the right things that are in tune to what people are thinking" (Singleton). The Tories' 1979 poster "*Labour isn't working*" is regarded as a classic. The Saatchi advert showing the snaking line of a dole queue is said to galvanised public concern over unemployment and at the same time, the (miss)use of state social benefits. On the other hand, the 1997 infamous Conservative advert showing Tony Blair with demonic eyes was too heavy to handle for the electorate – people are media aware and like to make up their minds. Mr. Blair was at the time considered to be a fairly decent bloke and the advert did not go down well.

Considerations while campaigning:
- *Historic voting patterns*
- *Strength and weaknesses of the candidates*
- *Quality of the campaigns being run*
- *Recent, reliable public opinion polling (public and private)*
- *Relevant local, state and national trends and issue influences*
- *Observations from local politicians, reporters, analysts and campaign consultants*
- *Fundraising capacity*
- *Special efforts by party committees, interest groups and other political forces*
- *Demographic composition of the electorate*
- *Election-day turnout components and patterns*

Odds, which are translated into percentage of chances of winning, are updated only when there is a specific need to make a change. In some races updates are entered daily; in others they may not change in months. The closer the elections the more updates are made, often reflecting faster paced campaigning and increased news coverage and voter interest.


MACEDONIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2002

Graffiti outside a polling station in the heavily - Albanian populated village of Saraj near Skopje stating **"Death for Kaurs (Christians)"** – pejorative for ethnic Macedonians with added abbreviation for the both Albanian Armies (UCK / ANA), **"freedom"** and the leader's (Ahmeti) name

Parliamentary elections in Macedonia were organised as a three-tiered structure (the same structure is used for presidential and municipal / local elections) and it is consisted of three bodies: the central State Election Commission, District Election Commission in each of the 85 electoral districts and Polling Election Board for each of the 2973 polling stations.

Parliamentary elections 2002 were held for the first time in accordance to the proportional model under which the country was divided in six electoral units. While the Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) made the crime and corruption the main topic of their campaign, adding peace and stabilisation to it, their Albanian coalition partner, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) had campaigned most strongly for the consistent implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. VMRO DPMNE – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity focused their campaign on their past investments and future efforts for Macedonia, together with the Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA). Both of them kept though their separate national platforms that went along the lines of strengthening Macedonian national unity and statehood (DPMNE) and Macedonia as confederation of two equal peoples / nations, the Macedonian and the Albanian, plus cantonisation or other models for physical division of the territory (DPA).

On the whole the election day was marked with high voter turnout (more than 70 percent), few incidents of violence and a generally orderly process. The opposition TOGETHER FOR MACEDONIA, coalition between the SDSM and 10 other minor parties emerged as a victor in the September 15th parliamentary elections wining 59 out of 120 seats over the ruling DPMNE and the Liberal Party (LP) which have 34 seats. DPA won 7, while DUI garnered 16 seats in the Parliament and became the third largest faction. The remaining seats are shared between the smaller parties.
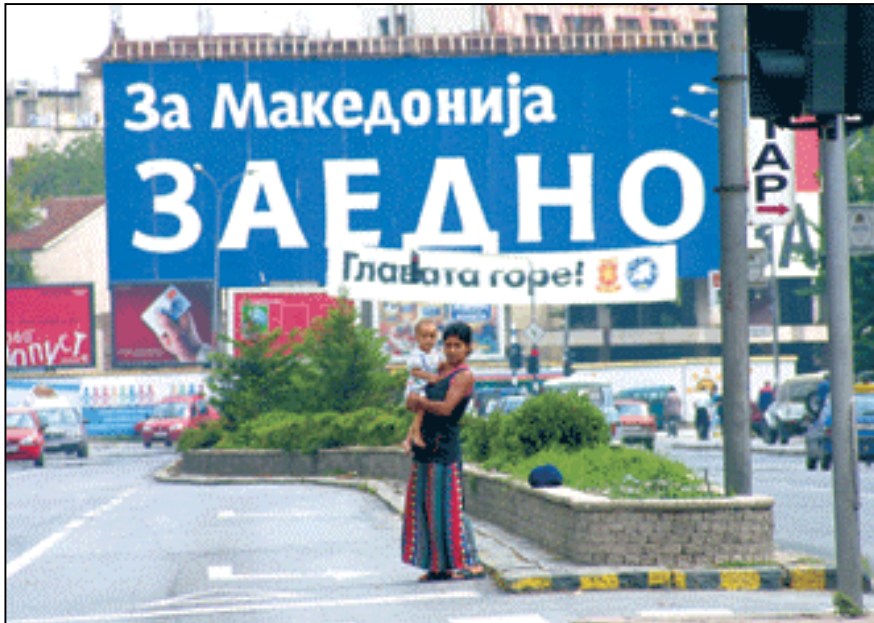
Two slogans together: the two main ethnic Macedonian rival parties with their slogans one next to the other: **FOR Macedonia Together** (SDSM) and **Head Up** (DPMNE)
At the front: young Roma girl with a small infant in her hands begging

THE PARTIES

SDSM and DUI is the winning coalition group that inclines to the 'left' – they have social-democratic orientation, and arise or follow the former communist parties (SDSM emanated out of the Tito Communist Party, while DUI is close to the Enver Hoxha Communist Party philosophy).

While SDSM was on power from 1992 until 1998 (ruling in coalition with another Albanian party PDP, 1994-1998), DUI originated 2001 proclaiming itself as a successor of the National Liberation Army of the Albanian fighters and with no political experience. Little differences can be thus found in their political platforms oriented to "democracy", "the rule of law", "social stability" etc. The major distinctions are in their 'style' or running the politics that has much to do with their background. While the SDSM members mostly originate from middle to high class families of the former communist functionaries, highly educated, travelled abroad, having experience and training in politics, DUI are the all-Albania dreamers from the time of Hoxha, living under years of pressure while studying in Kosovo and living mostly abroad, communicating with the emigrant groups having little touch with the reality on the ground.

DPMNE and DPA are the opposition group that was leading the country in the period 1998-2002. They are considered "rightist" and "populist" with radical approach to the national issues of both Macedonian and Albanian ethnic groups. They were fairly inexperienced when they came to power in 1998 being an opposition since 1992 (DPMNE) and 1996 (when DPA arose separating from PDP). Their radicalism might be differentiated in terms that DPMNE claims to follow the Krusevo Republic 'Statute' from 1903 that laid grounds for the first multi-ethnic (to use today's terms) Republic of Macedonians. DPA is following the pan-Albanian concept that will allow the Albanian nation regardless of the area where they live the right to join into one state divided after 1913 and the London Agreement.

DPMNE – SDSM (the Macedonian wing) - DPMNE can be seen as a modus vivendi to SDSM for its slowness and inclination to endless negotiations with little concrete outcome that is always pushed by DPMNE edge-pointed decisiveness. And vice versa. But the key balance is not in between the parties inasmuch it is between their leaders: CRVENKOVSKI vs. GEORGIEVSKI, the real-politik-man vs. stormy-idea creator, the moderate vs. the ecstatic and unpredictable. GEORGIEVSKI decided to withdraw from politics in 2002 and the party is now led by a fairly young politician of the new-DPMNE structure that more technocratic orientation.

DPA – DUI (the Albanian wing) - the problem in distinguishing these two parties was greater in the spring of 2001 when they were both defending the Albanian radical claims. Since the Ohrid Agreement July 2001, DUI turned to be moderate at least in regards to preserving the country unity. After September 2002, DUI took moderate role in the Albanian political life while DPA remained firm in their demand for change of the state political structure to confederation of two equal ethnicities.

MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT THE CAMPAIGNS

- Three out of four parties used leader-photo billboards at least in some stages of their campaigns (DUI at all times, SDSM and DPMNE in the last stage)
- DPA approach is different: their philosophy is to avoid creating the personality cult and thus never use the leader or other party members' photos for campaigning
- The ethnic Macedonian parties (SDSM and DPMNE) had full-scale campaigns with activities that followed each of the stages, and were vastly present, both on the streets (billboards, posters, leaflets) and within the media
- The ethnic Albanian parties (DUI and DPA) chose to go with only one billboard and additional posters on the streets that were variation of the billboards or just using the name and the number of the party representative as a code for citizens' voting. They also had TV clips

The difference in regards to the campaigns between the ethnic Macedonian and the ethnic Albanian parties can be explained in several ways:

Ethnic Albanian parties have lesser target groups to focus their attention to:
- The parties are still fairly sceptical to the political marketing – they believe in direct approach, talks in small groups, using the local populace to attract voters
- Their target groups live in less dispersed areas (mainly the western areas of the Republic of Macedonia)
- The Albanian populace is in general considered to be pretty conservative (in social, moral and religious sense)
- Their education is more middle-to-low
- They live mostly in remote areas with no substantial media presence and this may be one of the reasons why the usage of media is considered as a show-off compared to the "real value of the hard labour"
- Income-wise, the target groups of the Albanian ethnic parties are more dispersed and can be divided in a similar way as within the Macedonian populace: small percentage of fairly rich, with middle class still composing

the biggest group in the society, and significant number of poor, mostly rural or sub-urban families

Ethnic Macedonian parties have more diverse target groups to cover:
- The parties have experience in campaigning and are part of the Christian-Democrats (DPMNE) and Social-Democrats (SDSM) networks that offer training programmes and media and marketing support for the members
- The populace is more dispersed throughout the whole country
- The target groups are considered less conservative compared to the Albanian, and the party representatives presence in the media is observed with curiosity and amusement
- It is also more dispersed in terms of urban – rural areas of living. The other characteristic of the Macedonian populace is that it is more urban-concentrated than the Albanian one
- The education scale is more diverse too and in favour to high-to-higher education as another difference comparing to the Albanian populace
- The income scale is similar to the Albanian target groups, though the Macedonian middle class is in decline towards the poor due to the privatisation processes and reduction of the public sector employment

At the beginning, the opposition coalition started with better-designed video presentations and billboards offering beautiful scenery and faces suggesting the peace and peacefulness needed the most for the people of this country. There were no concrete faces as we were used from the previous SDSM campaigns, only abstract motives and tautological messages "One is Macedonia" and "One is the Life". At the same time, the rival-party DPMNE and their coalition partner LP entered aggressively and onto several levels: on one hand, symbolic messages and pictures of church bells, trees, sports shoes, crosses, etc., and on the other concrete numbers (budgets) and projects from the party programme. During the last ten days the coalition For Macedonia – Together changed the strategy and went for "the personal" approach. The familiar faces appeared on the walls, CRVENKOVSKI and his ministers promising the voters something that was *never* promised before: the legal state, employment, integration into Europe, and alike.

THE BILLBOARDS – GENERAL COMMENTS

These elections showed less quality in the overall campaigning compared to the elections in 1998. This can be explained with many reasons, and some are objective, such as the armed conflict in 2001, immense political processes in 2001 and 2002, etc. All these events pushed aside the elections and campaigning suffered from both political and marketing aspect.

The most dominant characteristic of these elections was the leaders' presence on the walls, in the magazines, on the TV clips and in public debate shows. The usage of LEADER figure is considered as a restored FATHER FIGURE – a tribal symbol of power and the chief. In our, so called, democratic societies, the ones that are/going to be leaders are faced with a very hard task: to convince you to vote for them, and to make you believe at the same time, that the process of ruling with you will be for your benefit. This process is hard since we are still nowhere – our minds struggle with the remnants of the old totalitarian scheme, though longing for freedom. Our leaders are thus standing in front of the task to persuade the voters that s/he represents not the

power, but the power of the people where the *act* is not on their own, but on behalf of the others. Thus the PHOTO as a SIGN has a dynamic message, since the face should express what the viewer reflects and anticipates, creating an active process. The *iconic side* of billboards is that they all "looks presidential" where the question "who" is answered by "the leader" as the knowledge, the trust, but also "one of us". The leader-photo also represents the shadow of the ancestors, the face for today, reactive, flexible, open-minded and opportunist, adding dramatisation, information and ideology. In this context the DPA billboard is seen as "iconography with no icon". The three parties displaying their politicians went with, the so-called "young options": CRVENKOVSKI, GEORGIEVSKI and AHMETI are all between 35-45. The symbolism is a *young man, friend, boy-friend* and the leader as "our man" representing at the same time our desires and aspirations, and our weaknesses and values, the style of living, where he is our story which we make into history. The leader here appears as a sum of many functions: man, husband, manager, politician (synchronic). He is the political image of the past, in the present times and for the future (diachronic). The photograph symbolises one place – one time, but also adds the element of change (syntopic and diachronic).

> - *Persuasive faces – a city boy, Mafia man? The one who knows, you should believe in*
> - *Eyes staring at you – inviting you to vote, persuading you, saying – I am the one*
> - *Eyes staring up – to the future / a bit weak? Charming?*
> - *No hands, only the upper body – stylists would point to the neck, as a symbol of power or the absence of 'necks' in this case / perhaps on purpose?*
> - *The smile – a bit ironic, creepy – both were fairly negative figures in fairly negative times*

There are many levels of understanding the billboards that include denotation, or what the signs stand for; connotation, the cultural associations involving emotional overtones, subjective interpretations, socio-cultural values and ideological assumptions – trust, power, confidence, intelligence. They include the metaphor and metonymy to explain the unfamiliar by using familiar terms, any many more (see Umberto Eco and the ten fundamental codes as instrumental in shaping images). The billboards also use digital identification – numbers instead of forms. They resemble to Brecht' epic theatre – step outside the realism – where the photograph is the magic mirror (accentuating the role of propaganda). We perceive the on screen-event as real, we think that we witness the non-staged reality. The faces on the billboards thus became actors, performers with inner and outer mimicry and incarnation. They construct the images, playing with the "fantasmatic" (Freud) relationships and the spectators' space (its Ego), disclosing the elements that reveal the apparatus, the ideology. They contain the *hermeneutic codes*, the colours and symbols through which the 'story' is problematised and resolved, and the *mirror phase* that offers to the spectator to gain its identity.**THE COLOURS AND THE SYMBOLS**

SDSM and **DUI** used **BLUE, YELLOW** (golden and earth-yellow) and **WHITE** as their colours.

> Both parties used BLUE as a background colour, yellow and white for their messages and some of the main symbols (the Stars). SDSM used also red for their symbols (the Rose and the Hearth)
>
> BLUE symbolises loyalty, honesty, liberty, ideal, spiritual and non-material, wisdom, but also the TSAR / the RULER. It is the ancient symbol of the

God's power assigned to the rulers on the Earth (thus, the notion "the blue blood" in royal families), where the blue-ness (as the intelligence and the reason, and the natural-by-birth right to rule) is the opposite of the red-ness (the passion, the reason-less and thus, low-by-origin and to be ruled and controlled). The BLUE was by default a colour of the royalties and still is. Yet, with the appearance of the socialist movement, this colour became the benchmark of the Socialist International alliance though in the latter stage of their existence. (The first Socialist colours were the red and the black that were latter taken on by the Anarchists and other movements with revolutionary and populist character, such as the Zappatistas, etc. There are many interpretations as to why this happened. They are mostly related to the process of overthrowing one rule with the other, the autocratic with democratic, the unjust with the justice and justifiable one, so the blue was taken over to assure the justice and balance that socialist and democratic regimes offer in contrast to the aristocratic ones.

SDSM' main PARTY SYMBOLS are the <u>Yellow Star</u> and the <u>Red Rose</u>. They link the party with the other members in the family of the Socialist International alliance. These symbols represent the glory of the past, the memories of victory, the memories of those that gave their lives for the freedom and the revolution (Yellow Star), but also the beauty, the love, the courage and the respect, and above all, the alliance of all peoples (the Red Rose). On the badges, they used the <u>Red Hearth</u> to symbolise their love for the country and devotion to the people.

DUI used the <u>Yellow Stars</u> they have on their party flag surrounding the three letters – abbreviation of the name of the party. They represent the European-hood, the main orientation of the party, the democratic aspirations, but also all other elements that the Star-symbol has in its self, mostly linked with the history of the nationhood.

ALL FOUR PARTIES USED

WHITE, mostly used in the messages / letters, though as a colour on the billboards and posters as well, symbolises the nobility, liberty, independence, generosity, frankness, the GOD.

YELLOW and golden describe the Sun, the glory, the ROYALTY, something precious, beautiful, of a noble nature. This colour is used interchangeably by all parties as is the white, mostly in their symbols since the colour marks something of a value that precedes everything else, the Star of all Stars, the Golden Lion, the Golden Stripe that embraces all.

DPMNE and **DPA** used **RED** and **BLACK**, with **YELLOW / GOLD**

RED is used to represent the life, the blood, resurrection, and also sovereignty, the courage, self-sacrifice, generosity, love, and ultimately the PEOPLE. RED is the passion of life, the courage to flow and change, define and rule, the enjoyment in life – the hedonism. Both parties chose the RED as a symbol of the past wars of their peoples, the remembrance of the dead and their glory, but also to show the aspirations and the way they are to rule: firmly. The red in this context adds more totalitarian dimension to the rule: the clear top-bottom structure, where the top is for the restricted few, with less structures in between the layers than in the blue-system that is more bureaucratic, with plentiful institutions and clerks. This is not to say that the red-structures are less just or even less free than the blue (remember Orwell?) but I will keep away from this area for the time being.

The BLACK is also a common colour for DPMNE and DPA. BLACK is the fearful symbol of hunger, misery and death – an expression of the roots and activity of the labour movement. Black is a very powerful colour or an anti-colour. Historically, black is associated with the blood, dried blood specifically and is a sign of NEGATION. BLACK as a negation of nationhood that puts the peoples against themselves and denies the unity (DPMNE against Communist rule / DPA against the rules that oppose Albanian unity into one country). It is anger and outrage against hypocrisies, a colour of mourning over victims murdered in wars (historical injustice) to the greater glory. BLACK is also beautiful – a colour of determination, of resolve, strength, a colour by which all other are clarified and defined. ("Mysterious surrounding of fertility, the new life reproduced from the darkness, through the strange journey of the sperm, the secret growth of the embryo in the womb protected by the dark" / Reinventing Anarchy)

The BLACK-RED flag symbolises the attempt to unite the death and the life, and give meaning to the life, but also stress the heroic dying and resurrection

DPMNE party symbol (though not used on their billboards) is the Golden Lion – the symbol of Macedonian nationhood of Alexander the Great. It also stands for glory, heroism, beauty, the unprecedented power. The other symbols they used on their billboards during the first phase of their campaign will be fully elaborated in the following sequences of this presentation that discus the messages.

DPA used their main symbol, the DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE as the focal point of the billboard, adding many other symbols that will be analysed in connection with the messages.

The EAGLE as a symbol personifies power. His two heads are looking both to East and West, having double jurisdiction (over the two parts of the world, and the two 'worlds': the one on the Earth and the other on the Skies). It is also Janus Bifons, a male and female with single imperial crown – the ultimate ruler. The DOUBLE HEADED EAGLE represents the completion and perfection, the ultimate truth. It is the old Albanian symbol, and its placement in black at the centre of crimson-red field become the national flag of Albania during the early part of the 20th century. It was also Scanderbeg's personal standard in the 15th century.

SDSM
- **One is Macedonia**
- **One is the life**
- **One is the choice**

The tripartite slogan is an attempt to create an absolutely truthful syllogism following the example that is used in the classical symbolic logic:

All humans are mortal	A *is* B	One is Macedonia	A *is* B
I am a human	B *is* C	One is the life	A *is* C
_____	_____	_____	_____
(thus) I am mortal	B *is* A	(thus) One is the choice	A *is* D

Positive aspects of the slogan:
- The slogan is generalisation and (thus) tends to appear as a truth without-any-doubt
- The slogan is easy to remember and triggers emotions (positive emotions for the life-values, and the country) but also raises concerns, makes citizens being aware of the seriousness of the choice in front of them
- It offers 'the problem' and 'the solution': the life, the country (being at stake) and the party that will make them better / improved
- The slogan has a story and is dynamic: it starts with Macedonia as "our country" and "our land" (beyond the ethnic divisions) stressing the importance of the life, our individual life and our joined life in our country, focusing at the end to the true choice – the party, SDSM.

The most positive aspect of the slogan is its non-ethnic dimension or the focus on the joined values for all peoples: their lives and their country, the shared moments, the shared history and shared future. What they could have avoided though, is the apocalyptic dimension of the one-life / one-country / one-party slogan, and that is the element of the choice as our destiny. What slogan suggested, the election-list carriers spoke in public during their campaigns: DPMNE – DPA were taking our country toward "the point of no return" and "it is NOW" that the citizens "have to DECIDE" and make the "TRUE choice" to save their lives, the country voting for the Social Democrats. This apocalyptic notion of the message was immediately spotted by different media and intellectual critics, and become a topic for mockery soon after being printed on the billboards. The negative criticism is even stronger now-a-days, year after they came to power, being evaluated and judged for all they did not or could not do. The weirdness of this apocalyptic approach is that it is stressed by the Social Democrats while the Macedonian radicals (that we kind of 'naturally' expected to use this approach) offered no vision of this kind.
The slogan-makers would fool themselves if they stick to the saying – the more general the slogan, less options to be directly attacked and more possibilities to 'play out' with the criticisms. On contraire. The new marketing theories suggest that the slogans should be as concrete as possible. The basic difference between the conclusion that is reached within, the so-called "Socrates syllogism" and the marketing attempt of the ruling party to play with the truth is actually in the "playing" part. The three, so called statements not only lack A – B, C – A, and C – B relation, but are (thus) tautologies (A = A). There is no relation between "the One" and "the life"/ "the Macedonia" / "the choice", and conclusion can result out of the two

statements formulated into the third one, since the B and C ("the Life" and "Macedonia") sum and equalise into D ("the Choice"). This 'conclusion' takes us actually to other 'sums':

- A *is* B *is* C *is* D equalises A / B / C and D, and says that they are the "same" or "the One" if we turn the whole syllogism around, being a negation of the fundamental democratic principle on plurality of choices and truths and paths to knowledge, and goes back to the famous "One Party – One Choice / Truth" totalitarian though

- If A = B = C = D than D appears as the ultimate conclusion of all elements and thus the CHOICE becomes the ultimate result, and definition of life and country. So, not only that Macedonia proves its existence through SDSM, but our life is nothing without that party as a choice (will be in this case following other choices treated as anti-Macedonia and anti-life ... *index idearum prohibitorum*?)

DPMNE

The main slogan:
Head (proudly) Up – Macedonia is (here) for you

The main message:
- Clear, concrete message
- The two parts make one composition that is logical and positive

The slogan has several distinguishable sub-messages:
- Be proud about who you are – positive self-esteem
- Be proud that you are Macedonian – historical perspective
- Macedonia is your country – identity message
- Macedonia is here for you or there are possibilities for you in Macedonia – positive message for the youngsters to stay in the country, for businessman to invest, for elderly to see their future is secured

Other messages and symbols:
- *We create for the future* – symbol: the Church Bell. Meanings: Christian and traditional values, the family, the party investments in the cultural heritage – reparation of old monuments etc., southern part of the country

- *Celebrating work and fertility* – symbol: <u>an Apple</u>: fertility, the link with the food-producers, the ordinary citizens throughout Macedonia, farmers and workers, southern and western part
- *Macedonian and European* – symbol: <u>the Pipes</u>: oil and gas pipe line, the European option, a message for senior citizens and businessman interested in the new EU project, the technology and modernisation of the country, central Macedonia
- *Live your life* – symbol: <u>the Tennis Shoes</u>: the youth, the sports – healthy life, the playfulness, the joy, city of Skopje
- *The State is guaranteeing* – symbol: <u>the Seals</u>: security, legal state, rights and freedoms, guaranteeing the future, guaranteeing the good life, a message for the state forces (the soldiers and police officers) that fought during the conflict in 2001, eastern part of the country
- *Standing firmly on the ground* – symbol: <u>the Tree</u>: stability, the roots, the house, the life, ancestors and successors, parents and children, western part of the country torn by the conflict, displaced families and ruined houses

<u>The main fault</u>:
Despite the proclaimed idea to attract new voters, most of DPMNE messages targeted the groups that they already had: the workers, the farmers, families respecting Christian traditions, the soldiers. The only new categories were perhaps the youngsters in the city of Skopje, and the businessman from the central Macedonia. The campaign was also perceived as ironic to some extent, since the billboards and the messages spoke of the previous government positive efforts in an overall bright manner. (One example: the contrast between the always serious and angry PM Georgievski during the years of his rule and his smile on the billboard stating his belief in the future.) Too brightly presented past results caused negative and repugnant effects due to the freshness of people's memory related to the past conflict and many faults done by DPMNE representatives during their rule. One of the main marketing problems of this party was how to deal with the conflict and the conflict memory while working on the political image making. There are no ideal solutions to this issue apart from what can be learned from this example: the topic should have not been avoided, but the approach should have been carefully selected (perhaps conflict reconciliation instead of "the bright future promises"). One can argue that the party had mentioned the conflict on one of its billboards, the one that describes the bravery of the former Minister of police and presents him in a glorious semi-Napoleon style. It is highly doubtful though whether this message is positive one to those that did not agree with the methods used for resolving the conflict in 2001.
Another problem is related to the Macedonian language, that I believe, as any other language in the world offers numerous opportunities for playing around with the words by adding them sexual connotation. The word "head" in the Macedonian language has the regular meaning – the top part of the human / animal body, and another one that is related to the top part of the male sexual organ. By saying: "Head Up" you can say to have your head up and be proud, but also to have your sexual 'potentials' activated are ready. The ways this context was further used can be easily guessed. The important lesson is to be always aware of the language subtleties.

DUI

Main slogan:
Victors Together with You

- Clear and positive message
- Accentuated the active role of the voters

Main focus: WE as VICTORS
- WE are the VICTORS – vote for US
- WE, as VICTORS linking the PAST , the PRESENCE and the FUTURE (victors again)
- Positive message to the Albanian populace and their SELF-ESTEEM to see WE as the GROUP that is wining

Second focus: TOGETHER
- Activism and support – WE did the victory (2001) because YOU were with US, because WE were TOGETHER – invitation for a new JOINED victory

Negative aspects:
Policy and candidate preferences are shown to be influenced by standing party identification, social values, racial attitudes and antagonisms toward such groups as Nazis, different ethnicities, etc. Some of the theories claim that one's group identity is psychologically central to the individual, if the self-esteem is low, dependent upon the group or dependent upon perceiving one's own group as superior to other groups. Thus, a "sense of group's position" especially VICTORS' position is likely to generate ethnic prejudice towards the LOSERS' group. The political parties are often perceived in terms of which groups they favour or oppose, and the voters adopt mostly the "ideologies by proxy" from the beliefs of their own groups, providing psychological foundation for ego-involved attitudes (Campbell; Converse, etc.) If we add to this the middle-to-low education and less urban–more rural target group of DUI, than the use of "victors' group" triggers an immediate negative response to the opponent ethnic group seen as "the losers" and is in direct opposition to their proclaimed multi-ethnic and peaceful cohabitation party programme.

DPA

Perhaps the most complex billboard both symbolically and graphically. The way it was produced though, the colour combinations, the unclear positioning of the symbols and the overall combination of elements is both philosophically and artistically highly questionable.
The billboard reflects the philosophy of their leader, Arben Xhaferri. His approach in politics was analysed by many national and international thinkers and analysts, and it is said to be the most future-oriented and long-term focused in comparison to the politicians not only in Macedonia but also in the region. All in all, the billboard is far too complex for the ordinary citizens and too unclear.

The message:
Striving towards West

- Interesting, provocative and promising

Point One: the STRIVE
- STRIVING as historical goal, emotional call that find its justification in the TIME as duration / LONG TIME
- STRIVING as a method pointing the way HOW to do it and WHERE or TO WHERE

Point Two: the WEST
- WEST as an idea, the beautiful, imagined, democratic WEST, as our FUTURE, where things CHANGE to BETTER
- WEST as a direction, side of the world, WEST as ALBANIA, with-no-border TOWARDS the eternal direction

  Additional symbols:
  - The flags of NATO, EU and US – support, protection, recognition, aspiration
  - The Macedonia within the region – tide region that shows the bordering states, points the country and the brother-nation regions covered with the friends' flags: Albania and Kosovo
  - The Country Border – the lack of border on north-centre, north-west, west, openness of the border towards the regions populated with Albanians living in Kosovo and Albania, linking the peoples together
  - The Double-Headed Eagle in the centre of the state – recognition of the Albanian nation on equal stand

Negative aspects:
They are fully aware of the "west-striving" symbolism and the lack of border that is in accordance to their political claims.

Avoiding placing FACE on their billboards as an attempt to fight against idol-orientation is not less totalitarian or more democratic. To say simply VOTE FOR THE PARTY and not for the face is more choice-restrictive than to put the representative on the billboard and give populace the option to like / dislike the candidate. The pattern chosen by DPA reflects the firm and hierarchical structure of the party and offers no opportunity to argue for the better.

FINAL COMMENTS

The following final comments provide some insights of the Macedonian political life and an additional view to the situation in the country, peoples' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. The analysed parties represent almost 70 percents of the overall population having in mind the number of voters they attract, though on the Macedonian political scene there are other political subjects that should be analysed with due consideration also.

According to the data, it seems that the average Macedonian viewer grew in customer-sense since it seems much harder for the parties to find the right (visual) solutions and even harder to bear with the consequences of the choices they made. Macedonian citizen, consumer and voter seems to have a good memory on the past party efforts, evaluates their presentations, given promises and achieved results, and reacts on any attempt to be mistreated. On the other hand, the analysis shows that few parties went with concrete messages – the majority followed the old pattern of too bright-too future images. If we take into account the change in the Macedonian consumer perception, than it would be better for the parties in Macedonia to follow the needs and requests of the voters, than to play on the old mantra that the market will demand what they will offer / create. The Macedonian citizen, regardless of his ethnic background and his fears related to the violent conflicts and unstable future, is growing to be a serious critic to the groups and individuals leading the Macedonian political life. The demand is for more responsibility and more truth.

Summary analysis:

The NATIONALISM is still strong as an emotion / trigger in attracting voters:
- Three out of four parties (DPMNE, DUI and DPA) used nationalism (in particular, ethnic nationalism) in their campaigns either through the display of symbols (DPMNE, DPA) or through the messages (DUI, DPA)
- SDSM was the only party that used no ethnic connotation on their billboards

The NATIONALISM is stronger in attracting voters within the ALBANIAN ELECTORATE:
- Two out of two Albanian parties (DUI and DPA) used nationalism as an approach either through the messages and/or through the display of symbols
- One out of two Macedonian parties (DPMNE) used nationalism as an approach in their symbols (the church bell, and the photo of the former Minister of police)

GLORIOUS IMAGES and HEROIC DISPLAYS are still attractive for the voters:
- Three out of four parties (SDSM, DUI, DPA) used general, ecstatic or heroic images and messages
- DPMNE was the only party that proposed concrete, simple, clear, graphically and symbolically consistent solutions

People still vote for the LEADER:
- Three out of four parties (SDSM, DUI, DPMNE) displayed their leaders in the best possible light, and the fourth one (DPA) did not even needed to, since their leader is the benchmark of the party

The use of PARTY SYMBOLS is in decline:
- The overall styling of the billboards was changed to better – only one out of four parties (DPA) used their party symbol (the double-headed eagle) on the billboard, while the others played with different artistic solutions

End marks and tips:

- <u>DPMNE campaign was both graphically, artistically and from the symbolic point of view the most coherent</u> in the messages, symbols, colours and overall photography, with right targets, clear goals / messages and use of appropriate mechanisms / symbols. Their major fault was that they could not find a way to deal with the past conflict and to include their visions into the campaign. They were also somewhat unready to deal with the "new voters" though they planned to. Due to many reasons, they went for the 'safe' option that was creatively fine, but left no significant mark on the overall scale. DPMNE are now without Georgievski who was their focal point from symbolic, political and philosophical point of view. With the new leadership and structure they are faced with a problem of being in between the two 'images' (the old radical, and the new technocratic). Should they desire to regain the contact and support from their grassroots (local party cells and supporters) they should start working on it.

- <u>SDSM went for the more general and ecstatic approach for this campaigning</u> perhaps being prepared that the DPMNE would choose that option? Regardless of the reason, their campaign compared to the one in 1998 was felt weaker, with lack of creativity especially in the messages and the overall party PR. They added stronger aristocratic notion to the approach presenting themselves as the elite group that would lead the nation into the right direction. This approach is already creating great headaches for their leadership, and will continue to do so in the period to come, since the situation in the country will unfortunately be too far away from their promises. They should reconsider their attitude and perhaps choose their final direction – liberals, labourists or conservatives – since it seems that they float in between.

- <u>DUI tried to combine the past glory (the heroic element of Ahmeti) and the leadership notion (the leader of the nation)</u>. Both elements combined with the party' lack of political experience and the overall unstable situation in the country, plus having DPA as an opponent will be the major block for DUI winning on the local elections. And if they loose majority of the local positions, they can surely count on either an early leave from the government or loosing majority of the voters during the next elections 2006.

- <u>DPA went firmly as always</u>. They did not paid much of an attention to the artistic side of their performance as much as on working on the ground. They know what are their strongholds and weak points – their major weakness is the lack of intellectual 'capacities' and middle-age / middle-to-high and high class business support. If they plan on wining the next local and parliamentary elections they will have to improve their 'image' that is now too rough and Mafia-oriented to regain the trust of the target group they intend to incorporate. They will also have to deal with the radicalism in a different manner that will give the youngsters of this ethnicity another option for life apart from resentment.

Some findings point that the reasons voters give their votes tend to be rationalisation of their evaluative preferences rather than derivations of their "reasons". Early deciders and highly politically involved are especially likely to muster extensive cognitive rationalisation for their prior preferences.

The elections in Macedonia 2002 showed how little effort both on artistic and scientific side was involved in the process. Some of the reasons for this neglect can be traced down in the armed conflict of 2001, and the aftermath political events. It also shows that faced with the lack of time and perhaps capacities to direct their efforts on proper campaigning, the parties focused on what they had – the REPUTATION, the record of their past efforts and the leadership as the only thing of substance to offer to their voters in support to their promise for good governance. This way the parties followed the polar opposite strategies to what the relationship-marketing is proposing: by neglecting their membership and core supporters, members, activists, ordinary parliamentarians and general constituency, they have all become relatively peripheral to media-focused, leader-centred strategies intended to promote the party's reputation among the weakly-aligned target voters. A clear, centrally controlled target message may indeed be necessary for short-term electoral advantage. However, such benefits are not cost-free, according to the marketing theory. Neglect of the internal market will most likely result in a less committed core and a decrease in the value, and prospects for face-to-face contact with the customers. The raising or downfall of reputation as a key variable helps explain why it is that voters perhaps voted for one party while apparently preferring the policies of another, and on contraire to how mush they agreed or supported the steps parties did in the past. At the hearth of any definition of marketing is the 'marketing concept': an approach that puts the consumer at the beginning rather than the end of the production-consumption cycle. It is a philosophy of business which says that companies can best achieve their objectives by attending to customer wants and needs at the start, not just the end of the production process. Marketing than becomes the cornerstone of the business philosophy because consumers are empowered with greater choice thus being less susceptible to the allure of advertising and sales promotion alone. Scammell argues that "the digital, global and deregulated economy massively expanded the competition and choice, thereby substantially shirting further the power balance in favour of the consumers". These possibilities of information and choice are effectively transforming the market so that the consumer, and not the producer, is the hunter creating the marketing-demand. Clearly, there are parallels in the development of consumer and political marketing. Just as the consumer in general is empowered through increased choice and vastly expanded resources of information, so too is the political consumer. The new commercial market of empowered consumers is provoking re-thinking of the strategies towards relationship marketing, towards investment in the idea of voters-customers as citizens, and towards "the 'beautiful' alliance of design and social responsibility" (Scammell).

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