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Macedonian Presidential Elections Update

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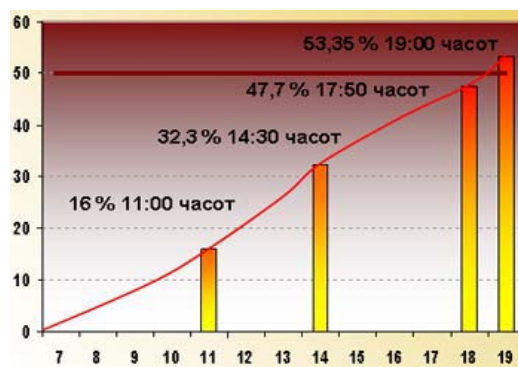
The official results from the 2nd round of the Macedonian presidential elections held on April 28 show that Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski won the presidential post with 62.66 percent of the total votes. By all international standards, the elections were considered considerably more fair than the 1999 election, which was riddled by violence and fraud. One difference this time was the presence of not only three hundred international monitors but also more than 3,000 domestic observers organized by the MOST Citizens' Association. Although incidents of irregularities and some fraud were witnessed in western and northern Macedonia and in the Skopje region, the overall assessment is that the elections were performed in a fair, peaceful and democratic atmosphere.

Turnout

Voter turnout was a main concern, as 50 percent turnout was required for the elections to be valid. A new round of elections would have delayed the passing of much needed decentralization legislation, which would have slowed down further the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. With NDI assistance, MOST conducted a parallel vote tabulation (PVT), which, based on a statistically sound sampling of polling station results, offers a 'quick count' projection of election results. MOST used the PVT to project voter turnout as well.

Early turnout figures were low. NDI's Vladimir Pran, who directed the PVT program with MOST, was closely following the elections and the turnout and at the same time reporting through MOST's Website that showed a very high number of visitors interested in election updates. Below is the turnout of voters as tracked throughout the day and as published on the MOST website (<http://www.most.org.mk>).

MOST's Turnout Results



Results

In a press conference at 10:30 p.m. on Election Day, MOST was the first organization to announce the election results as predicted by the PVT. The results showed that the turn out of voters was 53.35%, with Branko Crvenkovski receiving 60.64% and Sasko Kedev receiving 39.36% of the votes. Invalid were 3.3% of the total ballots.

The State Election Commission (SEC) released the first preliminary results at 1:00 a.m. on April 29, announcing almost the same results as MOST's. According to SEC and based on 99.08% of the processed ballots, 53.39% of eligible voters cast their vote, with Branko Crvenkovski receiving 62.66% (548,583) and Sasko Kedev falling behind with 37.34% (326,951) of the votes. There were 1.6% (29,506) invalid ballots.

Since SEC took into consideration even the polling stations where there were indications for stuffing of ballot boxes, their results showed a slightly higher percentage for Branko Crvenkovski in comparison with the results given by MOST. MOST based its results only on polling stations where irregularities were not registered.

As results were being announced and Branko Crvenkovski's victory was becoming more obvious, supporters of VMRO-DPMNE gathered in front of the Parliament to protest the validity of the elections. Protesters burned the party flag of SDSM and called for new elections.

Irregularities on the day of election

A highlight of the second round of the presidential election was the arrest of high ranking DPA officials (Ruzdi Matoshi, Secretary General and a Member of Parliament of DPA; Rafet Elmazi, former Deputy Minister of Interior; Afrim Ramadani and Ernard Fajzulahu) by the Tetovo Police because they entered a polling station in the Tetovo area armed and broke the ballot box. The police found two pistols which Elmazi and Matoshi carried without permission.

Evaluation of the election process

At a press conference on April 29th at Holiday Inn hotel, OSCE/ODIHR assessed the overall election process as generally consistent with OSCE election standards. However, according to the OSCE/ODIHR Mission, problems that occurred during the first round of voting, such as proxy voting, ballot box stuffing and intimidation were even more evident during the second round.

Please find attached the OSCE/ODIHR press release and a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions.