



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Parliamentary Elections – 5 July 2006

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Skopje, 6 July 2006 – Following an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to observe the 5 July parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 30 May. For observation of election day, the OSCE/ODIHR was joined by a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

This statement of preliminary findings and conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the election process, including the tabulation and announcement of final results and the expiry of legal deadlines for hearing possible complaints and appeals. A conclusive assessment of the entire election will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining phases of the process. The OSCE/ODIHR will publish a Final Report, presenting a comprehensive analysis of all observers' findings and offering recommendations for further improvement of the election process, approximately two months after the completion of the process. The PACE delegation will present its report to the plenary session of the Assembly in October 2006.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The 5 July 2006 parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were the ninth occasion for full-scale election observation by the OSCE/ODIHR. While the elections largely met OSCE Commitments and Council of Europe commitments for democratic elections, instances of violence and intimidation during the first half of the campaign and on election day cast a shadow over an otherwise generally well-administered election held in a competitive environment.

While election day took place in a generally calm environment and was conducted in an orderly manner in most of the country and the performance of Election Boards (EBs) was assessed positively in the large majority of polling stations, serious irregularities which undermined the universality and equality of the vote were reported from a number of municipalities, in particular Bogovinje, Brvenica, Gostivar, Struga, Studeničani, Tearce, Zajas and Želino. They included isolated cases of ballot-box stuffing, vote buying, and instances of tension and intimidation. Group and proxy voting were widespread. Voting procedures were not always followed, including important safeguards against multiple voting. The situation deteriorated during the vote count, which was assessed negatively in 15 per cent of counts observed; i.e. one in seven cases. While there were no deliberate attempts to tamper with the result protocols, serious irregularities were noted in 7 per cent of counts observed, and major procedural problems in 12 per cent.

The following positive features characterized the election process, several of which implement previous recommendations:

- The State Election Commission (SEC) approved, in an inclusive process, all candidate lists presented by 31 political parties and coalitions and two groups of voters.
- A competitive environment and broad choice of political alternatives was available to the electorate, including within ethnic communities.
- Overall, the broadcast and print media provided voters with a variety of political views allowing for an informed choice.
- Although the new Election Code was finalized only three months prior to the elections, the consolidated legislation provided a more consistent basis for the conduct of elections.
- The newly appointed SEC and 84 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) conducted election preparations in a largely effective and collegial manner, respecting the legal deadlines.
- For the first time, the SEC was supported by a permanent secretariat.
- The Election Code introduced gender quotas for candidate lists and election administration bodies, as well as provisions aimed at guaranteeing adequate representation of national minorities in the election administration.
- EB performance was assessed as ‘adequate’, ‘good’ or ‘very good’ in 97 per cent of polling stations.
- IEOM observers reported that on election day the police generally played a positive role in maintaining or restoring order when necessary.
- The high number of domestic non-partisan observers, in particular from the organization MOST, contributed to the transparency of the election day process.

At the same time, the following shortcomings were observed:

- The first half of the campaign was overshadowed by numerous violent incidents, including attacks on campaign offices, fights among party activists and shooting incidents, with no fatalities. Such incidents occurred in the municipalities of Saraj, Tearce, Lipkovo, Studeničani, Struga, Tetovo and Skopje Centar.
- Cases of abuse of administrative resources, especially by mayors’ offices, were noted by EOM observers.
- The public broadcaster, Macedonian Television, favored the ruling parties in its coverage.
- The State Anticorruption Commission identified two cases of illegal sale of state assets during the election campaign and called for further investigation by the relevant institutions.
- Political parties made widespread allegations of pressure on voters, including cases of vote-buying that were confirmed by the EOM.
- Certain aspects of the new Election Code, such as the requirement that all EB presidents be State or municipal officials, proved difficult to implement.
- The training of MECs and EBs was conducted late and in an inconsistent manner. In many cases, election officials only received the EB manual the day before election day.
- Almost half of the first instance courts contacted were not aware of their competence for resolving election-related complaints and were not familiar with the new Election Code.
- Legal safeguards to prevent illegal campaign financing are inadequate; for example, anonymous donations are allowed.

The institutions represented in the IEOM stand ready to support the authorities and civil society of the country to improve the electoral process, in line with OSCE commitments and Council of Europe and other international standards for democratic elections.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background

The Speaker of Parliament announced on 20 April that parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would be held on 5 July. The elections were due to be held by October 2006, but the parties agreed to hold the elections at the beginning of the 90-day period envisaged for regular elections. The 120 Members of Parliament are elected according to a regional proportional system without a threshold requirement. Twenty MPs are elected in each of the six election districts, whose boundaries are defined in the Election Code.

These elections were widely viewed as an important indicator for the country's ambitions for further integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The last parliamentary elections were held in 2002. Following those elections, a government was formed by the coalition 'For Macedonia Together', led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), and the ethnic-Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which continued in office throughout the term of the Parliament.

Legal Framework

These elections were governed by a comprehensive Election Code adopted in late March 2006. Although finalized only three months prior to the elections, it provided a more consistent basis for the conduct of elections and established an improved electoral framework. In addition, Parliament on 12 June adopted amendments to the Criminal Code which provide for stricter sanctions for election-related criminal offences, including long-term prison sentences.

The State Election Commission (SEC) regulated several aspects of the election procedures regarding, *inter alia*, the composition of election commissions and the nomination of their members, the training of election officials, activities of the police, and the rights and obligations of observers. The SEC adopted numerous instructions and clarifications on specific provisions of the Election Code.

Successful implementation of the new legal framework required all three components of the election process, namely voters, political parties and State institutions, to respect the letter and the spirit of the law and to uphold the rule of law. Certain aspects of the new Election Code proved difficult to implement in practice; for example, the requirement that all Election Board (EB) presidents be State or municipal officials. Moreover, further clarifications of some provisions of the Election Code are still needed. For instance, there was insufficient clarity about what precisely constituted "campaign activities", as opposed to regular party activities, and therefore which activities are allowed prior to the official start of the campaign period.

Various interlocutors voiced their concerns that political parties may not have respected legal provisions regarding campaign financing, especially the limits on campaign spending and the use of prohibited donations. Legal safeguards to prevent illegal financing remain weak; for example, anonymous donations are allowed. Moreover, while political parties are required to submit financial

reports on campaign financing after the elections, they do not need to include details of expenditures, only the total amount of funds spent. Thus, the competent institutions have limited possibilities to carry out a detailed audit of the reported expenditures. In particular, there is a lack of effective implementation and control mechanisms for ensuring compliance with the regulations.

Election Administration

The Election Code establishes a three-tiered election administration for all elections, including the SEC, 84 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and 2,976 EBs. The SEC was newly appointed by the Parliament on 14 April. In line with the Election Code, opposition parties, in this case the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE), proposed the SEC President, while governing parties, in this case the DUI, proposed the Vice-President. In practice, the remaining five members of the SEC were nominated by the other major political parties.

For the first time, members and deputy members of MECs and EBs were randomly selected from among civil servants, using a computerized database, rather than nominated by political parties. Under a transitional provision of the Code for these elections, two members of EBs are appointed by parties, one each by the main ruling parties and the main opposition parties. The presidents and their deputies were selected from among State and municipal administration officials, while the other members and their deputies were selected from among public administration officials. Specific criteria regarding gender and ethnic balance had to be met in the appointment process. Because all of these criteria could not be met by selecting officials from among local residents, approximately 3,000 election officials had to serve on MECs or EBs away from their home precincts. In conjunction with the MECs and State and municipal institutions, the SEC addressed the need for officials to be in their home precinct at some time during election day in order to vote.

For the most part, the SEC operated in an effective and collegial manner. Forms, instructions and regulations necessary for the conduct of voting were adopted within the legal deadlines and placed on the SEC website. The SEC undertook a limited voter education effort that included the production of some print material and three TV spots. For the first time, the SEC was supported by a permanent secretariat which added to the efficiency of its work.

However, the samples of the ballot papers, which had to be prepared separately for each of the six election districts, and in different combinations of official languages depending on the municipality, were adopted with some delay. This followed a process marred by disagreement within the SEC on the issue, amid indications of overt political pressure on the SEC and its President. The disagreement concerned the layout of the name of the VMRO–DPMNE coalition on the ballot, during which the SEC President, who is a nominee of VMRO–DPMNE, publicly threatened to resign. A compromise between the SEC President and the other SEC members was reached after consultations involving the leaders of the major opposition and governing parties. Ultimately, the ballots were printed and distributed to Election Boards on time.

In addition to its regular sessions, which were open to the public and to observers, the SEC also conducted informal closed sessions. At times, this led to confusion among the SEC members themselves as to what had been officially decided or just agreed upon during such “pre-meetings”. Only after an OSCE/ODIHR EOM inquiry did the SEC open its pre-meetings to observers. Although the SEC established a working group tasked with drafting its rules of procedure, they were only adopted one day prior to Election Day, too late to improve the internal organization and transparency of the SEC’s work. The SEC also began approving minutes of prior sessions only on 4 July.

The SEC organized mandatory training for MECs and EBs. The training for EB members commenced with considerable delay compared to the initial schedule. Explanations of procedures during such training sessions were not always consistent. The negative effect of this was worsened by the fact that the official SEC procedures manual did not reach members of EBs in time.

Voter Lists

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) displayed excerpts from the voter lists (VL) for public inspection in its regional offices from 5 to 19 May. In response to previous concerns, the MoJ also enabled citizens to check on the Internet whether they were included on the VL and ran several projects, including with the domestic-observer organization MOST, encouraging people to do so. More than 20,000 entries were checked. Prior to this, the MoJ had updated the VL and removed some 6,000 deceased persons.

As in previous elections, several parties questioned the accuracy of the VL, but initiated only a few concrete inquiries within the legal deadline for complaints. Most concerns related to voters living abroad and were linked to expectations that proxy voting would take place on their behalf. Under the law, such persons remain on the VL as long as they have permanent residence in the country. In an effort to minimize potential violations, the MoJ marked with asterisks the VL entries of some 58,500 persons known to the authorities to have been abroad for more than a year.

On 12 June, the SEC signed the 2,976 polling station copies of the voter lists, as well as 51 special excerpts from the voter lists which were used for early voting on 4 July in military units, prisons and by internally displaced persons (IDPs). A total of 3,514 voters (0.2 per cent of all registered voters) could vote under the early voting procedures. While the Election Code provides for early voting by military and prison detainees, it does not include IDPs; thus, the SEC instructions arguably went beyond the scope of the Election Code.

Candidate Registration

On 2 June, the SEC finalized the registration of candidate lists. Altogether, 31 political parties and coalitions, as well as two groups of voters, submitted candidate lists for one or more election districts, all of which were approved by the SEC in an inclusive process. Overall, a total of 135 lists were registered. Eleven parties and coalitions contested all six districts, and a further seven parties and coalitions submitted lists in five out of the six districts. Four parties and both groups of voters submitted lists for only one election district. The number of candidate lists per election district varied from 19 to 29.

Some concerns were raised about the DPA's decision to place one person with two pending criminal indictments and another under investigation for war crimes on their candidate lists.

Campaign Environment

Politics is primarily divided along ethnic lines, and the key races were among ethnically-based parties competing for votes within their own community. Politics has become more fragmented since 2002, particularly on the ethnic-Macedonian side, with a number of new parties challenging the two main rivals within the ethnic-Macedonian community, 'For Macedonia Together' and VMRO-DPMNE. They include VMRO-People's Party (VMRO-NP), which broke away from VMRO-DPMNE in late 2004, the New Social Democratic Party (NSDP), formed in October 2005 by former senior SDSM official Tito Petkovski, and the Democratic Reconstruction of Macedonia (DOM),

formed in January 2006 by Liljana Popovska, formerly a senior official of the SDSM's junior coalition partner, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The main ethnic-Albanian parties in the outgoing parliament, the DUI and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), were the principal contenders in these elections as well. The DUI fought the election in a coalition with two smaller parties, one of which represents the Bosniak minority.

Although according to the Election Code, the campaign was to begin on 15 June, several political parties conducted activities, broadly perceived as campaigning, prior to that date, including conventions, placing of billboards, and tours by party leaders. Mutual allegations were made that this violated the Election Code, however, the SEC stated that it was outside its competence to comment.

Although leaders of most political parties contesting the elections participated in the public signing of a Code of Conduct for fair elections on 13 June, the first half of the campaign was overshadowed by numerous violent incidents, allegations and counter-allegations. Most of these incidents occurred in the north-west of the country, and involved the DPA and the DUI. These included numerous attacks on party activists and campaign offices, notably in Saraj and Tearce. Other attacks occurred in the municipalities of Lipkovo, Studeničani, Tetovo, and Struga. A shooting incident in Saraj on the night of 18–19 June involved DPA and DUI activists; nobody was hurt during the shooting. At a further incident between DPA and DUI activists in Rašče village (Saraj municipality) on 24 June, some of the persons involved were beaten, and one was injured by gunfire.

On the night of 21–22 June, there was a fight in central Skopje between SDSM and VMRO–DPMNE activists, arising out of a dispute over the placing of billboard posters. The incident, which the parties blamed on each other, according to some reports involved shooting.

Political parties made widespread general allegations to the OSCE/ODIHR EOM about pressure on voters, including intimidation and inducements, especially towards vulnerable minority communities and public-sector employees. These included threats of loss of employment or social security benefits. In one case, a prominent civil society representative reported being offered a large sum of money from a political party not to participate in the election campaign for any other party.

Some parties complained to the EOM that their campaign activities in certain areas had been hindered due to violent attacks or intimidation. The EOM observed that the DUI's campaign in Saraj and Tearce municipalities was curtailed due to a number of attacks on its offices. The DPA alleged that its campaign activities were hampered in areas around Kičevo. The NSDP alleged that it had difficulties opening offices in Kočani, Kumanovo and Gevgelija municipalities, which it blamed on pressure from political opponents.

Opposition parties in particular made general allegations of abuses of administrative resources, especially by mayors' offices. The EOM noted the use of the premises of the municipality building of the Karpoš municipality in Skopje as a campaign headquarters for the mayor, who was also a 'For Macedonia Together' candidate. Similarly, in Šuto Orizari, public employees admitted to using municipality resources such as cars, human resources and phones for campaign purposes.

The State Anticorruption Commission identified two cases of illegal sale of state assets during the election campaign, namely, the sale of shares in thermal electricity plant TEC "Negotino" and of construction land in Skopje. The Commission was vigorous in publicly condemning such violations of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, calling upon all institutions effectively to protect the public interest and undertake all legal measures at their disposal to investigate alleged violations.

Political parties, especially among the opposition, frequently voiced considerable mistrust towards other parties as well as a lack of confidence in the electoral process. In statements that arguably undermined confidence in the law-enforcement agencies, DPA leaders repeatedly accused the police of partiality in favor of the DUI, notably during the clashes in Saraj. The Minister of the Interior denied such accusations publicly.

Among the larger ethnic-Macedonian parties, campaigning focused on economic and social issues and the prospects for EU integration. The parties strongly criticized each others' records and programs. By contrast, the campaigns of the DUI and the DPA centered on the government's success or failure in advancing the interests of the Albanian community. Negative campaigning involving insults directed at rival party leaders were a feature of the campaign. The DPA directed very harsh rhetoric at the DUI leader. The latter stages of the campaign saw an increasing recourse to negative campaigning, particularly involving mutual accusations of corruption directed at the SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE leaders, including a campaign of posters and newspaper advertisements depicting the VMRO-DPMNE leader in a negative light.

Participation of National Minorities and Women

In addition to ethnic Albanians, other minorities (Roma, Turks, Vlachs, Serbs, Bosniaks) have parties claiming to represent their interests, and most are represented by more than one party. Most parties representing smaller minorities participated in these elections within the two major coalitions.

The Election Code stipulates that in municipalities where at least 20 per cent of the population are "members of other ethnic communities", the composition of MECs and EBs must be based on the principle of "adequate and equitable representation", and use of minority languages is mandatory in election administration bodies. This requirement extends to ballots and all official forms and documents.

The OSCE/ODIHR EOM received numerous reports of electoral malpractices affecting minority communities, including attempts to buy votes in return for small sums of money, food or settlement of minor debts; threats of loss of social benefits or other public services; as well as more severe pressure and intimidation in some localities. The OSCE/ODIHR observed that in Štip, Roma ID cards left as a guarantee of credit at local stores were no longer there on election day. One local party leader told the EOM that his party would give shop owners some 500 Euro to cover the debts of their members.

Such practices, which are a matter of poverty rather than ethnicity, particularly affected socially and economically vulnerable groups, especially the Roma. One party leader was not aware that vote buying is a criminal offence punishable with at least five years imprisonment. The EOM also received indications that some Roma may be disenfranchised due to a lack of civil registration and proper identity documents.

Provisions of the Election Code aim to promote the participation of women in politics. Under the Code, at least one in every three places on a candidate list must be filled by a candidate belonging to the less represented gender. This provision was respected by all submitters of candidate lists. The Election Code also stipulates that each gender should hold at least 30 per cent of places in election-administration bodies. Long-Term Observers reported that this requirement was not met for six of the 84 MECs.

The Media

Throughout the 20-day campaign period, broadcast and print media at the national level provided voters with daily information regarding campaign activities and candidates' stances. Campaign information also included special election-related bulletins which covered the activities of the contestants and were regularly aired on public and the main private TV channels.

The legal framework governing the media during the campaign period includes the Election Code, the Rules for Equitable Media Presentation, and relevant provisions in the Law on Broadcasting Activities.

The public broadcaster, Macedonian Television (MTV), complied with legal provisions on the allocation of free airtime to submitters of candidate lists; the slots were allotted on the basis of the number of candidate lists submitted. In addition, MTV hosted a number of debates on its third channel MTV+, each focusing on a different topic, although no debate between the two main ethnic-Macedonian party leaders took place. A number of forums involving ethnic-Albanian candidates were aired on MTV2, which broadcasts predominantly in Albanian.

The OSCE/ODIHR EOM conducted an analysis of the main broadcast and print media, both prior to the commencement of the official campaign period (2–14 June) and from 15 June to election day¹. Monitoring findings indicate that in the period before the official start of the campaign, national broadcasters and newspapers covered Government activities at length.

During the official campaign period, on MTV1 evening newscasts the ruling coalition Together for Macedonia received 23 per cent of airtime devoted to political subjects, while the VMRO-DPMNE coalition received 17 per cent of the political time. News coverage of the government representatives acting in their official capacity was on the two monitored public TV stations significantly more when compared with the private channels (12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively on MTV1 and MTV2 compared with an average of 3.6 per cent on the three private channels monitored).

MTV2 in its Albanian-language newscasts provided DUI representatives with two times more coverage than DPA (39 per cent to DUI, 15 per cent to DPA). Moreover on July 2 this channel aired during the prime time a documentary dedicated to Ali Ahmeti and praising his reputation. On the other hand a more balanced coverage of the two main Albanian parties was provided by MTV2 in its special campaign-related bulletin called Election Chronicle.

The private television channels A1 TV and Kanal 5 were balanced in their news coverage of the two main coalitions, while TV Sitel favored the opposition in terms of quantity of coverage (40 per cent to the VMRO-DPMNE coalition, compared with 19 per cent for the ruling coalition Together for Macedonia). A1 TV focused its news coverage on the Party for Economic Reconstruction (PEO) more than on the two main contestants (19 per cent to PEO, 13 per cent to the ruling coalition and 13 per cent to the VMRO-DPMNE coalition).

Private and public TV channels failed in their overall programming to comply with the legal requirement that national broadcasters cover contestants proportionally to the number of districts in

¹ OSCE/ODIHR EOM media monitoring activities focused on the prime time broadcasts of the first channel of public Macedonian Radio Television, MTV1, and of the three private stations, A1 TV, TV Sitel and Kanal 5, as well as on the most important daily newspapers in the Macedonian and Albanian languages. In addition, the main news and debates in Albanian language on public MTV2 and the free-of-charge presentations and debates on MTV+ were analyzed.

which they are running. This provision proved to be problematic to implement for the broadcasters, mainly because of the different intensity of campaign activities organized by the various list submitters.

A noticeable amount of paid advertisements was placed in the national print and broadcast media, mostly by the main parties and coalitions. The PEO, whose leader is also the owner of A1 TV, ran an intensive paid campaign on this TV station.

Columns and commentaries containing a range of different political opinions were published in the daily newspapers. Newspapers provided voters with information on campaign activities and on technical and procedural aspects of the election process.

In general, the tone of the coverage in the print and broadcast media was moderate, with some partisan comments in a number of private outlets.

Complaints and Appeals

Protection of candidates' rights is guaranteed by two different procedures. Candidates may initiate a procedure regarding the violation of their rights during the election campaign before the courts of first instance, whose decisions can be appealed to Appellate Courts. Candidates may also seek protection of their rights before the SEC, and appeal an SEC decision to the Supreme Court. In addition, every voter is entitled to submit a complaint regarding protection of his or her voting rights to the SEC, and a subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court. All procedures involve short deadlines for rendering decisions.

Almost half of first-instance courts contacted by the EOM were not aware of their new competence and obligation to resolve certain election-related complaints and were not familiar with the new Election Code.

Domestic Observers

The Election Code provides for both domestic and international observation. The largest domestic observer effort was organized by the Citizens' Association MOST, which has observed elections since 2002 and deployed 3,500 observers for these elections. In addition to pre-election and election-day observation, MOST conducted a statistical projection of results based on official protocols in all six districts known as a "parallel vote tabulation."

Election Day and Vote Count

Election day took place in a generally calm environment and was conducted in an orderly manner in most of the country. However, serious irregularities and violations, which undermined the universality and equality of the ballot, were reported from a number of municipalities, in particular Bogovinje, Brvenica, Gostivar, Struga, Studeničani, Tearce, Zajas, and Želino. IEOM observers reported cases of ballot box stuffing, vote buying, theft of ballots and other election material, group and proxy voting, as well as tension and intimidation, including by groups of armed persons. Voting in several polling stations had to be suspended due to such incidents.

IEOM observers visited over 1,700 polling stations across the country. Opening procedures were assessed positively in 95 per cent of polling stations visited. Problems noted included minutes not being completed before the polling station was opened (15 per cent), serial numbers of ballot box

seals not being recorded (8 per cent), and party representatives and observers not being shown that the ballot box was empty (15 per cent). In a few cases, important election materials were missing.

The conduct of voting was assessed as 'bad' or 'very bad' in 5 per cent of polling stations visited. Proxy voting was observed in 4 per cent of polling stations visited, and family voting in 20 per cent. Clear indications of ballot-box stuffing were observed in ten cases. In 7 per cent of polling stations, observers noted multiple identical signatures on the VL, and in 2 per cent voters did not sign the VL. In 3 per cent of polling stations, ballot boxes were not properly sealed. Voters were not or rarely checked for traces of invisible ink, or the ink was not applied, in 7 and 4 per cent, respectively. In 5 per cent of polling stations, one or both stamps were not or only sometimes applied to ballots, which effectively invalidated them. In 13 per cent of polling stations, voters did not always mark their ballots in secret, and attempts to influence voters or one person 'assisting' numerous voters were each reported in 4 per cent. EB performance was assessed as 'adequate', 'good' or 'very good' in 97 per cent of polling stations, and many procedural shortcomings appeared to stem from lack of prior experience and inadequate training.

Vote buying was reported from Radoviš and Kočani (affecting Roma), and attempts were reported from Strumica and Sveti Nikole. Undue pressure on voters by employers was reported from Češinovo-Obleševo. Intimidation of Roma voters was reported from Štip. Ballots and other election material were stolen in Bogovinje, Brvenica, Tearce and Želino. IEOM observers were obstructed, threatened or intimidated in four cases.

Tension or unrest inside polling stations were reported from 1 per cent of visits, as was intimidation. Unauthorized persons were present in 2 per cent of polling stations, and in 2 per cent they were interfering in or directing the work of the EBs. Overcrowding or disorganization hampered the process in 6 per cent of polling stations, and only one in two was characterized as accessible for persons with disabilities.

The IEOM also conducted limited observation of early voting of soldiers, prisoners and IDPs, and voting of homebound voters. In a few cases, procedural errors were observed, which appeared to be due to lack of specific training of EBs. In the Kumanovo IDP collective center, a significant number of persons were not on the VL, reportedly because they had lost IDP status.

The situation deteriorated during the count, with 15 per cent of counts assessed as bad or very bad. Major procedural problems were observed in 12 per cent, poor or very poor understanding of procedures by the EB in 10 per cent, and poor or very poor organization in 12 per cent of cases. Although no cases of deliberate falsification were observed, serious irregularities were reported from 7 per cent of counts observed.

Key procedures were not followed and safeguards against irregularities were not implemented. This included not counting the number of signatures on the VL (16 per cent) and not reconciling the VL with the number of unused ballots (19 per cent). In 29 per cent of observed cases, the reconciliation procedures were not completed before the ballot boxes were opened and in 9 per cent of observations the reconciliation figures were not recorded in the results protocol. The serial numbers of the ballot box seals were not checked in 19 per cent of observed cases. The determination of valid and invalid ballots was assessed as inconsistent in 8 per cent of observed counts, and in 24 per cent there was disagreement about ballot validity among EB members. When validity was determined by voting, the EB failed to write this on the back of the ballot in 74 per cent of counts. In 4 per cent, ballots were not divided in stacks by contestants, and in 4 per cent figures were not counted

accurately. Tension and unrest were reported from 5 per cent of counts, while unauthorized persons were present during 4 per cent.

Authorized party representatives were present in 94 per cent of polling stations visited during the voting and 94 per cent during the count. Domestic non-partisan observers were present in 67 and 68 per cent, respectively. IEOM observers reported that police generally played a positive role in maintaining or restoring order when necessary.

IEOM observers also visited MECs during the initial stages of tabulation, which was generally conducted in line with the procedures, although in some cases serious discrepancies were noted in the results protocols delivered to MECs.

*This statement is also available in Macedonian and Albanian.
However, the English version remains the only official document.*

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ambassador Audrey Glover (United Kingdom) is the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (Turkey) led the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) delegation.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission opened in Skopje on 30 May with 33 experts and long-term observers deployed in Skopje and eight regional centers. On election day, the IEOM deployed 382 short-term observers from 45 OSCE participating States, including an 18-member delegation from PACE. The IEOM observed voting throughout the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in more than 1,700 polling stations out of a total of 2,976, and counting was observed in 147 polling stations. The IEOM was also present in 81 Municipal Election Commissions to observe the tabulation of results.

The IEOM wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Election Commission, and other national and local authorities for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation. The IEOM also wishes to express appreciation to the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje and other international organizations and embassies for their support throughout the duration of the mission.

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