



**OSCE/ODIHR  
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**

**THE FORMER YUGOSLAV  
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA  
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS  
10 September 2000**



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**STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Skopje, 11 September 2000** — The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the 10 September municipal elections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia issues this statement of preliminary findings and conclusions.

The EOM, headed by Ambassador Charles Magee (USA), issues this statement before the final certification of the election results and before a complete analysis of the observation findings. The OSCE/ODIHR will issue a comprehensive and final report approximately one month after the completion of the electoral process.

The EOM wishes to express appreciation to 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.

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**Preliminary Conclusions**

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The 10 September municipal elections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia fell short on a number of international standards for democratic elections formulated in the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. In particular, the elections did not fully meet the country's OSCE commitment to conduct elections free from violence and intimidation, and to safeguard the secrecy of the ballot.

While voting took place in a calm and orderly manner in the majority of municipalities, the overall atmosphere was tense. Election day was marked by serious security incidents committed by individuals and supporters of political parties in some western municipalities, as well as irregularities and intimidation. Several serious acts of violence were reported, including shootings in which four people were injured. In the municipality of Debar, voting was canceled in all 24 polling stations due to acts of violence, destruction of ballot boxes and threats against election officials. In some polling stations in other municipalities, voting had to be temporarily suspended to restore order.

The Law on Local Elections has several shortcomings and inconsistencies, including a lack of definition of fundamental concepts, unclear norms for party representation on electoral bodies, and inconsistent time frames.

The role of the State Election Commission (SEC) is not clearly defined in the Law. The SEC chose to take a restrictive approach and only carried out the tasks specifically assigned to it in the Law. This led to some problems with regard to uniform implementation of the Law and election procedures. In some cases, such as vote count procedures, the SEC issued non-binding recommendations only after strong pressure from subordinate commissions to do so.

The events on election day were all the more regrettable as in the preceding weeks the campaign had been generally low-key and calm. A small number of campaign-related incidents were reported, but they do not appear to have been part of an orchestrated effort. However, violent protests outside the

residences of parliamentary deputies who left the main ruling party shortly before the elections, and the harassment and intimidation of their relatives, created an atmosphere of tension.

The funding of the elections was a major problem. Many municipalities lacked the financial resources to meet their legal obligations and carry out the elections properly.

A large number of electronic and print media offered a wide variety of political views and information, and enabled voters to make an informed choice. Legal provisions granting all participants in the elections equal amounts of free airtime on the national public broadcaster, Macedonian Television, were respected. However, Macedonian Television gave extensive coverage to government activities, usually positive in tone, thus indirectly favoring the ruling parties. The EOM was concerned about administrative measures taken by the taxation and building authorities against a number of private media shortly before election day. While these actions may have been within the legal framework, their selective implementation at a sensitive time is a source of concern.

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## **Preliminary Findings**

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### **Legislative Framework and Election Administration**

The municipal elections were held under the Law on Local Elections adopted in 1996. This law has several shortcomings and inconsistencies. Fundamental electoral concepts such as the term “majority” are not defined in the Law. For example, the Law does not state clearly whether a relative or an absolute majority is required for the election of mayors in a possible second round.

The norms for representation on electoral bodies are also vague. The provision that ruling parties and opposition parties must have an equal number of representatives on Municipal Election Commissions (MEC) and on Polling Boards does not specify whether the composition of the national parliament or the municipal council is the determining factor.

Some time frames are inconsistent. In particular, problems were caused by the provision that candidates need to open a campaign bank account 45 days before election day, while the deadline for candidate registration is 30 days before election day. As a result of this provision, a number of candidates who learned at a late stage that they would not be nominated by their party could not open a bank account within the deadline and were prevented from running as independents.

The Law specifies that independent candidates for mayor and municipal councils must submit the signatures of 200 voters, who are allowed to support only one candidacy or council list. Given that the number of voters in various municipalities varied from under 500 to over 100,000, this provision makes it extremely difficult for independents to register as candidates in smaller municipalities. A candidate could also be disadvantaged through no fault of his or her own if a voter signed more than one petition.

The roles of the SEC and MECs are not clearly defined and only a small number of duties are clearly assigned. The SEC took only a few steps to guide subordinate electoral bodies. This made the preparations for the elections more cumbersome than necessary. Training of election officials was conducted at a very late stage and after considerable controversy within the SEC, thus increasing the risk that the Law would not be implemented in a uniform way. Likewise, the SEC decided only after protracted arguments to issue a non-binding verbal recommendation that counting procedures from the Law on Parliamentary Elections should be applied in the municipal elections.

Funding of the elections was also a serious concern. Under the Law, the municipalities are tasked with financing the elections. However, most municipalities have major funding problems. No money was allocated in the annual State budget to enable the municipalities to meet these obligations despite the fact that municipal elections were due this year.

### **Election Environment and Campaign**

The election campaign was mostly carried out in a calm atmosphere, although the opposition tried to turn the vote into a referendum on the national government's performance. There was a small number of campaign-related incidents, but they do not seem to have been part of an orchestrated effort. In the village of Crnik (Pehcevo municipality), several supporters of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) were threatened by police officers, and one of them was beaten up. The police officers were suspended from duty pending the outcome of an investigation.

On 25 August, six parliamentary deputies of the main ruling party announced that they were switching to a different party. Later that day, their residences were surrounded by supporters of the ruling party and damaged. In Skopje, two government supporters were injured by gunshots under unclear circumstances. There were also reports that relatives of the six deputies were harassed and intimidated. These events created an atmosphere of tension.

In Tetovo, the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) list was rejected because a candidate had his name removed after the legal deadline. After losing an appeal in court, the PDP nonetheless decided to participate in the elections, abandoning earlier threats to boycott the elections nationwide.

### **Media Coverage**

The large number of electronic and print media — both at the national and local levels — gives the public broad access to information and a wide range of opinions. Most media provided regular coverage of the parties' activities, whether campaign-related or not. However, few media can be considered truly independent. In most cases, a pronounced editorial policy and support for one party or another are clearly visible.

The State broadcaster, Macedonian Television, provided free airtime to parties and candidates running in the elections. This time was distributed equally, as stipulated by law. In other respects, however, Macedonian Television largely failed to live up to its obligations as a public broadcaster, devoting 44% of its news programs to government activities, often in a positive tone. Another 15% was devoted to coverage of the ruling parties' activities. The SDSM-led Joint Opposition, by contrast, received just 8% of coverage.

Most Macedonian-language print media gave roughly the same amount of space to the various political subjects. However, there was often a distinctive difference in the tone of coverage. The government-controlled daily *Nova Makedonija* frequently reported on opposition parties in a negative way. Conversely, the private dailies tended to be critical of the government and the ruling parties. The Albanian-language daily *Fakti* devoted extended coverage to the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the government, often positive to the DPA, while at the same time being critical of the Joint Opposition and the PDP.

The EOM was concerned about administrative measures taken against a number of media outlets with a pronounced anti-government stance. The bank account of the publisher of the daily *Makedonija Denes* and the weekly *Denes* was frozen ten days before election day on the grounds that the company had failed to pay tax arrears. The private Channel 5 television station was threatened with the demolition of its new premises, ostensibly because the station had violated the provisions of the building permit. While violations of legal provisions seem to have occurred, at least in the latter

case, the EOM is concerned that actions against these media were taken shortly before election day, targeting selectively media that were critical of the government.

### **Election Day**

Overall, voting was carried out in a calm and orderly manner in the majority of municipalities. However, election day was marked by serious security incidents committed by individuals and groups of supporters of political parties in some western municipalities, as well as by irregularities and intimidation.

There were several serious acts of violence, including shootings in which at least four people were injured. In a number of cases, ballot boxes were destroyed, and voters were prevented from executing their right to vote. In the municipality of Debar, voting had to be canceled in all 24 polling stations due to acts of violence, destruction of ballot boxes and threats against election officials. In a number of polling stations in other municipalities, voting had to be temporarily suspended in order to restore order.

The general performance of polling boards was satisfactory, but inconsistencies in adherence to rules were noted in some cases. The following major irregularities were reported:

- A few blatant cases of ballot-box stuffing;
- Unauthorized persons were often present in and around polling stations, sometimes interfering in the process;
- Widespread family voting and instances of proxy voting;
- Identification documents not always checked.

Observers reported no major problems during the vote count. However, in a few instances observers were prevented from attending the count. The EOM noted a very high number of invalid ballots in the vote for municipal councils.

An initial analysis of the EOM's election-day observations suggests that there were few problems with the accuracy of voter lists. In this field, substantial progress appears to have been made.

The ODIHR expresses its concern over the incidents of violence and calls on the Government to investigate vigorously and immediately these and other breaches of the criminal code related to election violations. The ODIHR will monitor the follow-up to the election and stands ready to assist the Government in addressing the concerns highlighted in this preliminary statement.

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

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**Mission Information**

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This statement is based on the observations of election preparations and the campaign by 17 election experts deployed throughout the country for five weeks, and 130 short-term observers from 22 OSCE participating States monitoring the process on election day in over 850 polling stations in 108 municipalities. In addition, the EOM monitored two television channels and seven daily newspapers for a period of one month.

The EOM wishes to thank the OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje for its support throughout the duration of the mission, as well as the international organizations and embassies for their support on election day.

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