



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF
MACEDONIA**

**MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
10 September 2000**

FINAL REPORT



Warsaw, 17 November 2000

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**2000 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA.
FINAL REPORT OF THE OSCE/ODIHR ELECTION OBSERVATION
MISSION¹**

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission found that the 2000 municipal elections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia showed improvement in some areas, but fell short on a number of international standards for democratic elections formulated in the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. In particular, these 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 vote.

The voting on 10 September was carried out in a calm and orderly manner in the majority of municipalities, and the process was further improved during the second round on 24 September. Nonetheless, the election days were marked by tension, major irregularities, and acts of intimidation and violence at a number of polling stations. Several people were wounded by gunshots, and one man later died of his injuries. Ballot boxes were destroyed in a number of municipalities, sometimes immediately before the vote count, while some observers witnessed blatant cases of ballot box stuffing. Unauthorized persons frequently interfered in the election process.

The Law on Local Elections has a number of shortcomings and inconsistencies. The role of the State Election Commission is not clearly defined in the Election Law. The SEC took a restrictive approach to its duties, addressing only the relatively few tasks specifically assigned to it in the Election Law, and taking only a few steps to guide subordinate electoral bodies. This led to problems with regard to uniform implementation of the law and election procedures, and delayed publishing of countrywide results that undermined the transparency of the process.

Overall, the media gave extensive, generally accurate, and informed coverage to election activities, developments, and major political issues. Macedonian Television, however, fell short of meeting its obligations as a public broadcaster, devoting nearly 75 percent of its news coverage between the two rounds to government and ruling parties' activities and less than 10 percent to the Joint Opposition.

Given these shortcomings, the following improvements should be considered:

- The SEC should have a stronger mandate to provide decisive authority over the election administration;
- The various election laws and procedures should be integrated, preferably into a single election code;
- Standardized training should be introduced for election officials at all levels;

¹ This report is also available in Macedonian. However, the English text remains the only official version.

- Legislation regulating the State media should be expanded and strengthened to ensure independent, balanced coverage in news and other programs, with an appropriate enforcement mechanism; and
- National and local authorities, as well as political parties, should take steps, including more timely and decisive legal enforcement, to ensure that elections are free from intimidation and violence, and that the secrecy of the ballot is safeguarded.

The OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to work closely with the authorities in addressing these and other concerns and recommendations contained in this report.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following an invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the OSCE/ODIHR deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to monitor the municipal elections on 10 and 24 September 2000. Ambassador Charles Magee (USA) was appointed Head of the Election Observation Mission, which began operating on 15 August.

This report consolidates the findings of 17 election experts and long-term observers who were present in the country for eight weeks and who observed election preparations, the campaign, and election days, as well as the reports of 130 short-term observers who monitored the first round of voting and 80 short-term observers who monitored the second round. In total, international observers representing 25 OSCE participating States took part.² The election observation was generously supported by the OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje and by the diplomatic community and international organizations based in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM). Observers visited over 850 polling stations in 108 municipalities on 10 September, and over 500 polling stations in 61 municipalities on 24 September.

The OSCE/ODIHR wishes to thank the Office of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State and Municipal Election Commissions and other national and local authorities for their assistance and cooperation throughout the course of the observation.

III. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The 2000 municipal elections were the second local elections held in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since the country declared independence in 1991. Previous municipal elections took place in the autumn of 1996.

In the 1998 parliamentary elections, the “Coalition for Changes,” comprising the conservative Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE) and the centrist Democratic Alternative (DA), won a majority of seats in the Parliament. These two parties formed a government

² Participating States were: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States (plus one guest observer from Japan).

coalition with the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). The former ruling parties, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), the Socialist Party of Macedonia (SPM), and the ethnic-Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), lost power and are currently in opposition. Other parties which won seats in the 1998 parliamentary elections were the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Union of Roma.

Since the 1998 elections, there have been several changes to the composition of the Parliament. Most significantly, of the four LDP deputies, three left in early 2000 to join the re-established Liberal Party of Macedonia (LPM). In August 2000, six deputies left the VMRO–DPMNE caucus and joined the newly formed VMRO–True Macedonian Reformist Option (VMRO–VMRO). Despite these difficulties, the ruling coalition still commands a comfortable majority in the Parliament.

The current government coalition has proven stable in its two years in office. It has achieved progress in a number of fields. Relations with the country's neighbors have generally improved. Interethnic relations remain delicate, but progress has been achieved, especially with regards to better representation of ethnic Albanians in the State administration. Equally important, the contentious issue of Albanian-language university instruction is close to being resolved through negotiations involving the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, with recent amendments to the Law on Higher Education allowing for the establishment of private universities with instruction in minority languages. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has also made progress regarding closer integration into European and Transatlantic structures, with discussion on a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union expected to be concluded soon.

However, problems remain. The economy, in particular, is in a precarious state, with substantial reforms advancing slowly and unemployment remaining at a very high level. The opposition is criticizing the government for its relative lack of success in the sphere of economics and the confrontation between the opposition and the government leads to a constant atmosphere of high tension in country's politics.

The 2000 municipal elections were particularly significant since they were held almost half way through the mandate of the current parliament, and one year after the controversial and highly contested presidential elections of 1999. The opposition tried to turn the elections into a referendum on government performance with the aim of forcing early parliamentary elections. However, the ruling parties denied any connections between municipal elections and government popularity.

In the municipal elections, the VMRO–DPMNE and DA ran in a coalition under the slogan “*Za Dobroto na Site*” (“For the Good of Everyone”). The main opposition coalition, “*Za Makedonija–Zaedno*” (“For Macedonia–Together”), also known as the Joint Opposition, comprised the SDSM, the LDP, the SPM, and the League for Democracy. The two main ethnic-Albanian parties ran independently in most municipalities, although both of them concluded alliances with smaller parties in some municipalities, and the DPA formed alliances with “dissident” local branches of the PDP in two municipalities in Skopje.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A. GENERAL OUTLINE

The principal legal texts establishing the framework for the municipal elections include: the Constitution (1991), the Law on Local Elections (1996) (hereafter Election Law), the Law on Local Self-Government (1995), the Law on the Territorial Division [of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia] (1996), the Law for Election of Members of Parliament (last amended in 1998), the Law on Voters Lists and Voter Identification Cards (1998), and the Law on Political Parties (1994).

The Election Law establishes the general framework for municipal elections, including the electoral system for the election of mayors and municipal councils, a three-tiered election administration, rules for campaigning and campaign financing, election day procedures, and complaints and appeals procedures.

The Law on Local Self-Government defines the tasks and duties of municipalities and their elected and appointed bodies. Municipal councils have between 13 and 25 members, depending on the population of the municipality. The Council of the City of Skopje has 39 members, of whom 25 are directly elected and 14 are delegated by the seven Skopje municipalities (two per municipality).

Under the Law on the Territorial Division, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is divided into 123 municipalities, plus the city of Skopje, which has a special status. The number of residents varies greatly among the municipalities: the smallest municipality had only 492 registered voters in the 2000 elections, while the largest one had over 100,000 voters.

B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Under the Election Law, municipal councils are elected through a proportional system (Article 2(2)). No threshold needs to be surpassed in order to gain representation in municipal councils. Council seats are allocated using the d'Hondt method (Article 53).

Mayors are elected directly by majority vote (Article 2(3)). To be elected in the first round of voting, a candidate must receive a majority of all votes cast, and turnout must be at least 50 percent (Article 55). If those conditions are not met, candidates who received at least 10 percent of votes advance to the second round (Article 56(1) and 56(5)). If only one candidate polled 10 percent or more, he or she and the second-placed candidate proceed to the second round (Article 56(2)). If no candidate received at least 10 percent, the two best placed proceed to the runoff (Article 56(3)). In the second round of voting, which must be held two weeks after the first round, a relative majority is sufficient for a candidate to be elected, regardless of turnout (Article 57).

Every citizen of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia aged 18 or over on election day is eligible to vote and to be elected, provided he or she has permanent residency in the country and has not been deprived of his or her "business capacity" (Article 3). Citizens serving in the military can vote at their military unit, and their ballots are then transferred to their home municipality (Article 50(1)). Citizens temporarily residing

abroad can vote at their last place of residence or at diplomatic or consular offices abroad (Article 50(2)).³

V. THE PRE-ELECTION PHASE

A. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The Election Law provides for a three-tiered election administration: the State Election Commission (SEC), Municipal Election Commissions (MECs, plus the Election Commission of the City of Skopje), and Polling Boards (PBs).

The Law on the Election of Members of Parliament regulates that the SEC consists of a president, eight members, and their deputies appointed by Parliament for a four-year term. The SEC president and two members must be Supreme Court Judges, while three members each are proposed by the opposition parties which won the highest number of votes in the last elections and by the parties in power (Article 13).

The MECs and the Election Commission of the City of Skopje are appointed by the SEC for a four-year mandate. MECs are composed of a president and four members with their deputies. Two of the members are nominated by opposition parties which received at least five percent in the last parliamentary elections, and two by the ruling parties. MEC chairmen must be judges.

PBs have a president and two members with their deputies and are appointed by the MECs. Opposition parties nominate one member and a deputy, and ruling parties the other member and deputy.

Parties or supporters of mayoral candidates or council lists can nominate a representative and a deputy to MECs and PBs. These representatives are not MEC or PB members but have the right to attend the sessions of MECs and PBs and to participate in their work in certain cases laid out in the Election Law (Article 11).

While the current law provides for multi-party representation at all levels of the election administration, it would be more appropriate for municipal elections to use the composition of the municipal councils – rather than of the national Parliament - as a guideline to determine the role of opposition and ruling parties on MECs and PBs. Another obvious shortcoming in the current Election Law is that it states that the composition of the Parliament elected in 1994 should serve as the basis for allocating membership to individual parties. Although the SEC and MECs decided to determine the allocation based on the results of the 1998 elections, it is obvious that the letter of the law in this respect is not satisfactory.

1. The Role of the State Election Commission

The Election Law fails to precisely describe the role of SEC in municipal elections. The SEC is exclusively tasked with appointment of MECs (Article 8(2)), deciding on post-election appeals against MEC decisions (Article 59(5)), and accrediting domestic and

³ The latter option, however, was not implemented in these elections and voters residing abroad had to return to their home municipality if they wished to vote.

international observers (Article 70(2)). Thus, for the municipal elections, the SEC decided to limit itself to those duties and did not take an active role in the election preparations. This led to a number of problems and inconsistencies that could have been avoided had the SEC assumed a more active role. Lack of supervision and guidance in some cases resulted in non-uniform implementation of electoral rules.

For example, the SEC in cooperation with the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) developed a manual for polling station officials that detailed election day procedures. However, the SEC decided to recommend this manual at a very late stage. This unnecessarily complicated the training of election officials since there was very limited time – less than two weeks – to conduct the training before election day.

Another problem concerned the definition of valid and invalid votes. The Election Law includes a very strict definition of valid votes: only ballots on which the ordinal number before the name of the mayoral candidate or the councilor list has been circled are considered valid (Article 45). The parliamentary election law, by contrast, states that ballots should be considered valid if the will of the voter is expressed in a clear and unambiguous way. This is in compliance with a 1996 Supreme Court ruling that ballots should be counted as valid if the will of the voter is clear.

The SEC decided not to adopt a decision on the validity of ballots before the first round of the 2000 municipal elections. The SEC only issued a non-binding verbal recommendation to the MECs a few days before the first round that the provisions from the parliamentary election law should be applied. However, this recommendation did not serve to guarantee uniform application of election rules. On 21 September, only three days before the second round, the SEC issued guidelines that ballots should be counted as valid if the will of the voter was expressed in a clear and unambiguous way.

2. Registration of Candidates for Mayor and Councilors

Mayoral candidates and lists of municipal councilors can be proposed by registered political parties or by at least 200 voters. Parties can form coalitions, but they can only support one mayoral candidate and one municipal council list in any given municipality. Similarly, voters can only sign to support the nomination of one candidate list for mayor and one for municipal councilors.⁴

The stipulation that independent candidates must be nominated by at least 200 voters caused problems in light of the widely differing number of voters per municipality. While it was not difficult to collect the necessary signatures in larger municipalities, in small municipalities, even if all voters had provided support signatures, only two or three candidates could have technically managed to collect the necessary signatures. Besides, candidates who collected just the minimum number of signatures could find themselves disenfranchised through no fault of their own if a citizen who signed their candidate lists also signed another petition. In light of the very large variation in the population of municipalities, it would be desirable if the number of signatures that need to be collected by independent candidates would be proportionate to the number of voters in a particular municipality.

⁴ Skopje residents can sign lists for their municipality and for the City of Skopje.

The provision that bank accounts for campaign expenses must be opened at the latest 45 days before election day, while the deadline for candidate registration is 30 days, also caused problems. In several cases, incumbent mayors only found out that their parties would not nominate them again after the deadline for opening the bank account had passed. Thus they were effectively prevented from running as independent candidates. Other candidates complained that they had failed to meet the 45-day deadline due to bureaucratic obstacles within the bank or because the person in charge of opening such bank accounts was absent due to the summer holiday season.

Finally, the provision that the number of candidates on a council list must equal the number of seats on the municipal council can result in difficulties. If one candidate withdraws after the legal deadline for changes to the list, this could result in the invalidation of the entire list. Indeed, this happened in the municipality of Tetovo, where a candidate who was on the PDP list withdrew after the deadline and the party list was excluded from the municipal council vote.

3. Voter Registration and Voters Lists

Voters lists for each polling station were compiled from up-to-date extracts of civil registers maintained by the Ministry of Justice. Those extracts were reviewed by the MECs before being issued to the PBs. A total number of 1,634,859 voters were included. In previous elections, the accuracy of voters lists had been an important source of concern. However, election day observations indicated that the accuracy of voters lists was not a major problem and that substantial progress has been made in this field.

Each PB received two voters lists (within the City of Skopje, four), one for the mayoral and one for the council vote. In many polling stations, only one of those lists was used to mark who had voted. It would be preferable to have only one voters list for each polling station, which could contain columns for marking which kind of ballot was issued to the voter. This would make procedures in the polling station less cumbersome and time-consuming while at the same time reducing the scope for mistakes.

4. Ballot Paper Design

As in other elections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, ballot papers were serially numbered for security reasons. In order to safeguard the secrecy of the vote, PBs were advised to shuffle ballot papers at the beginning of election day and to issue them to voters face down. However, this was not always done. Observers saw both stacks of ballots in consecutive order and PBs issuing ballots face up. Such practices seriously undermine the secrecy of the vote since they enable PB officials and party representatives to find out how individual voters voted. In order to safeguard the secrecy of the vote, ballots in future elections should not contain serial numbers, unless the serial numbers are printed on detachable coupons or stubs.

Another source of concern was the fact that all ballot papers for these elections were printed on white paper. While they contained different marks on the back in order to assist voters in putting the ballots in the corresponding ballot box, voters in many polling stations were confused. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the SEC prior to election day refused to disclose details about the design, size, and color of the ballot papers, ostensibly for security reasons. It would have been easier for voters to handle their voting material if ballot papers for mayoral and council elections had been printed

on different-colored paper and if their key design features had been made public at least a few days beforehand.

5. Funding of Election-related Expenses

Under the Election Law, municipalities are tasked with covering all expenses related to the municipal elections. In practice, this provision proved unworkable. Municipal authorities receive very little funding from the State budget and have very limited possibilities to raise money on their own. Consequently, they are hardly able to cover everyday expenses in the municipality, let alone fund elections.

While most municipalities demanded additional funds from the State budget in order to cover election-related expenses, the Finance Ministry adopted the position that under the law, municipalities have to cover those expenses and should have put aside funds for that task. The government only set aside funds totaling 30 million denars (around \$430,000) for the work of the SEC.

As a result of the financial problems of most municipalities, there was a large degree of uncertainty over how the municipal elections would be conducted and how the expenses would be covered. Some MEC representatives told the Election Observation Mission that they would not perform their duties unless the national government agreed to provide extra funds. Others said that they were forced to cover some expenses from their own pocket since they had not received any funding. Ultimately, threats by polling officials not to perform their tasks did not materialize, and the first round took place as scheduled.

On 11 September, the Finance Ministry took the decision to allocate a total of 19 million denars (around \$280,000) to the 117 municipalities that had asked for financial assistance. Although a welcome move, an earlier decision would have helped avoid confusion and problems stemming from insecurity over the funding situation. The Election Observation Mission also noted that between the two rounds, money was received mostly by municipalities where the mayoral race had already been decided in the first round. At the same time, many municipalities with runoffs due on 24 September did not receive any funds from the Finance Ministry until a few days before the second round.

B. MEDIA AND THE ELECTIONS

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a diverse electronic and print media landscape. Along with the development of a multi-party political system, a fairly high number of privately owned media have sprung up over the past years. Although they are not subject to State control, most media have a pronounced editorial policy and often openly support one political party or another. Ultimately, however, the public can receive information from a wide variety of sources with differing political perspectives.

The Constitution of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia protects freedom of expression and of the media and prohibits censorship (Article 16). The Election Law contains a number of detailed provisions pertaining to the role of the media in the election campaign. The Election Law establishes, *inter alia*, the right of contestants in the elections to inform the public about their activities on an equal basis (Article 25(1)).

Article 30 of the Election Law states that the Parliament has to adopt guidelines for campaigning and for “balanced presentation” on television at the latest 40 days before the elections. The guidelines adopted by the Parliament contained the basic framework within which public and private media had to operate during the election campaign.

Macedonian Television, the State broadcaster, had to provide contestants in the elections with an equal amount of free airtime while private broadcasters were under no such obligation. Both State and private media could sell time or space for political advertising or “paid political broadcasting,” which usually included longer advertising or footage from campaign events.

The Election Observation Mission analyzed broadcast of the First Channel of Macedonian Television (MTV1) and private A1 Television on a daily basis. The monitoring team also monitored seven daily newspapers: *Nova Makedonija*, *Dnevnik*, *Makedonija Denes*, *Utrinski Vesnik*, *Vecer*, *Vest*, and *Fakti*.⁵

Between the two electronic media monitored, there were pronounced differences in terms of both campaign and political coverage.

MTV1 equally distributed free airtime to the contestants in the municipal elections. Paid political advertising on MTV1 was used almost exclusively by the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition (91 percent), while paid political broadcasts were used mainly by the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition and the government (44 and 51 percent, respectively).

Apart from the free and paid advertising, MTV1 devoted 48 percent of its domestic policy coverage to government activities, often in a positive tone. Another 13 percent was devoted to the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition, and five percent to the DPA. As with the government, the tone of coverage was often positive. By contrast, the “Za Makedonija–Zaedno” coalition received only eight percent of coverage on MTV1.

In its news coverage, A1 was more balanced than MTV1. Of A1’s domestic political news coverage, 36 percent was devoted to the government, 18 percent to the opposition coalition, 14 percent to the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition, and 12 percent to the VMRO–VMRO. At the same time, there were more critical reports on the government, the ruling parties, and the VMRO–VMRO than on MTV1.

Political coverage of the campaign period by daily newspapers showed that the Macedonian-language dailies devoted roughly the same amount of space to individual political subjects. However, there were distinct differences in the tone of that coverage. There was also a clear difference between government-controlled *Nova Makedonija* and the other newspapers, with the government-controlled paper providing unbalanced coverage.

C. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

1. The Legal Framework

The Election Law stipulates that contestants in municipal elections have the right to present their platforms under the same conditions and equally, through mass media,

⁵ The findings of the media monitoring are attached in Annex 1.

posters, and pre-electoral gatherings (Article 25). The official campaign begins 30 days before election day and ends 48 hours before election day (Article 26). Public spaces may only be used for campaign purposes if no other suitable premises exist in a municipality (Article 33).

Campaign expenses are limited to 10 denars per voter, with a spending ceiling of 60,000 denars per candidate list for municipal councils, and 100,000 denars per mayoral candidate. If those sums are “significantly” exceeded, candidates can be rejected, and if illegally obtained funds are used, the election of councilors or mayors can be annulled (Article 37). Entitlement for compensation for campaign expenses exists only for those groups who had a mayor or councilors elected and amounts to 10 denars per vote received (Article 38).

The last two provisions are problematic in several respects. While Article 37 aims at providing a level playing field, there is no clear definition as to when the spending ceiling is exceeded to such an extent that sanctions apply. This not only does not guarantee a level playing field, but it could also serve as a pretext for disqualifying candidates arbitrarily. With regard to campaign-expense compensation, it is problematic that only winning candidates are entitled to partial reimbursement of their expenses. Mayoral candidates who pass a certain threshold should automatically be entitled to campaign compensation.

2. The Campaign

The campaign for the municipal elections was generally calm and low-key. All major parties held meetings throughout the country, made extensive use of billboards and advertised in the media.

The “Za Makedonija–Zaedno” coalition campaign was more visible than that of the ruling parties, mainly because the opposition tried to turn the elections into a referendum on the government’s performance with the aim of forcing early parliamentary elections. The ruling parties, by contrast, initially tried to deny any connection between the municipal elections and the government’s performance. Only on 25 August, when it became known that six VMRO–DPMNE deputies were about to switch to the VMRO–VMRO, Prime Minister Georgievski in an interview on Macedonian Television said that he would ask the parliament to call early elections if the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition trailed the Joint Opposition by more than 10 percent. Shortly before the first round, he included the DPA in that equation. Since the votes of the three ruling parties and of the Joint Opposition were very close, Georgievski after the first round said there was no need to call early elections. Although the Prime Minister’s announcement raised the stakes and could have increased tensions, the election campaign was generally conducted within acceptable limits.

The Election Observation Mission noted a number of isolated campaign-related incidents, but they do not appear to have been part of a systematic and orchestrated campaign. In the early stages of the election campaign, in the village of Crnik, Pehcevo municipality, a number of SDSM supporters were threatened by police officers, and one of them was beaten up. The two police officers involved were suspended from duty pending the outcome of an investigation. In a number of cases, campaign offices of various parties were damaged, usually by stones thrown.

The Election Observation Mission noted no significant violations of the campaign silence period.⁶

D. PRESSURE ON PRIVATE MEDIA AND ON OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS

In the 2000 municipal elections, the EOM noted with concern a number of cases in which the government or the ruling parties exerted undue pressure. Most significantly, the EOM noted pressure on a number of media critical of the government, on parliamentary deputies who switched from the VMRO–DPMNE to the VMRO–VMRO, and on activists of opposition parties.

1. Pressure on Private Media

Shortly before the first round of the municipal elections, the publishing house NIK “Denes,” publisher of *Makedonija Denes* and the weekly *Denes*, came under strong administrative pressure. On 31 August the company’s bank account was blocked, ostensibly because NIK “Denes” had failed to pay tax arrears. Following a tax inspection in the spring of 2000, the Public Revenue Office on 15 May reached a decision that NIK “Denes” had to pay those taxes once the decision went into effect and following a 15-day grace period. On 4 July, NIK “Denes” filed a complaint against that decision with the Finance Ministry. The company never received a final ruling, which means that the Public Revenue Office’s decision is not executable. Nonetheless, the decision was enacted and the bank account of NIP “Denes” was blocked. Furthermore, interest charges were added to the tax arrears although the complaint was still pending. In early September, the Public Revenue Office corrected its earlier decision to state that the order was executable “15 days after it had been delivered.”

The EOM is concerned about the blocking of the bank account since it appears that correct legal procedures had not been entirely followed and since the decision was executed shortly before the elections. Also, the blocking followed a series of articles published in *Makedonija Denes* that were highly critical of the charitable foundation “Blagovestie,” whose director is Snezana Georgievska, the Prime Minister’s wife. The EOM also noted that lawyer Aleksandar Andonovski, who represents NIK “Denes” in that case and is a member of an NGO-sponsored Lawyers Network for media, received threats and on 20 September was visited by tax inspectors for no apparent reason.

On 30 August 2000, the State Inspectorate for Construction and Urbanism notified private Channel 5 Television, which is owned by a son of VMRO–VMRO Chairman Boris Stojmenov, that the station’s new studios had been built without a valid building permit and would be torn down. The Inspectorate based its ruling on a decision from January 2000. According to Channel 5, the new studios are larger than envisaged in the original building permit. Channel 5 asked for a modification of the permit several months earlier but never received an answer. Although the studios were not demolished, it is noteworthy that Channel 5 came under pressure shortly after the transfer of six parliamentary deputies from the VMRO–DPMNE to the VMRO–VMRO and over six months after the original demolition order was issued.

⁶ Campaign silence starts 48 hours before election day.

2. Pressure on Members of Parliament

On 25 August, six deputies of the VMRO–DPMNE publicly announced their transfer to the recently formed VMRO–VMRO, which is headed by former VMRO–DPMNE leading member and finance minister Boris Stojmenov. That same evening, groups of VMRO–DPMNE supporters assembled outside the homes of these deputies, hurling stones, eggs, and tomatoes and intimidating them. In Skopje, one deputy fired shots, he claimed, in the air. The VMRO–DPMNE claimed that two of its supporters were injured in the incident. In some cases, police were present but took no action. On 26 August, similar incidents — although on a smaller scale — took place outside some of the deputies’ houses. Tensions were reduced after both parties called on their followers to refrain from violence.

The EOM is especially concerned about the fact that following the transfer of these six deputies, some of their family members also came under pressure. The wife of one deputy works for the State-owned electricity company “Elektrostopanstvo.” In late August she was transferred from Skopje to a new workplace in Oslomej, over 100 kilometers away, although she has a small child and cannot be transferred under existing legislation. The sister of another deputy was told that she need not return to her workplace in a school in Kumanovo.

3. Pressure on Opposition Supporters

The EOM investigated reports about pressure on opposition supporters, mainly of the SDSM. The reports that the Election Observation Mission was able to examine proved to be accurate. Specifically, on 19 September two employees of the Agriculture Ministry were temporarily transferred from Krusevo to Debar, over 50 kilometers away. The two men are known opposition supporters. In a second case, seven employees of the “Niko Doaga” tobacco company in Krusevo were assigned less responsible positions on 15 September. The Election Observation Mission established that they were opposition supporters, some of whom had acted as party observers during the first round of the municipal elections. Finally, nine employees of the “Anska Reka” agricultural company, based in Valandovo, were transferred to different workplaces, and one was assigned a less responsible position. Again, the persons in question were opposition activists.

E. DOMESTIC OBSERVERS

In the only written decision that the SEC adopted before the first round of voting, the Commission on 16 August regulated the rights and duties of domestic and international observers.

After the status of domestic observers had been regulated, a number of domestic organizations applied for accreditation as election day observers. By far the biggest group was the coalition “Citizens for Citizens,” which served as an umbrella organization for seven domestic NGOs. “Citizens for Citizens” accredited around 1,600 observers, most of whom were deployed on 10 and 24 September. The domestic observation effort covered all parts of the country. Working in teams of two, most domestic observers remained in one polling station throughout election day in order to monitor the entire electoral process in those sites. “Citizens for Citizens” issued preliminary reports in the days following the two rounds of voting.

Domestic observers were generally able to carry out their tasks unimpeded, although a number of cases of intimidation during both election days were reported.

One problem for domestic and international observers alike was the fact that the SEC decision specifically mentioned the need for observers to have a letter of accreditation issued by the SEC, while the SEC ultimately only issued accreditation badges. In a few cases, this was used as justification to prevent observers from monitoring the polling process or the vote count.

The EOM welcomes the participation of domestic observers, which can serve to enhance the transparency of the elections and increase trust in the election process.

VI. ELECTION DAY — ROUND ONE, 10 SEPTEMBER 2000

A. GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Overall, voting on 10 September was carried out in a calm and orderly manner in the majority of municipalities. At the same time, however, election day was marked by serious security incidents committed by individuals and supporters of political parties in some municipalities, mostly in western parts of the country, as well as by irregularities and intimidation.

B. INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION

In the municipality of Debar, voting had to be canceled in all 24 polling stations due to acts of violence. Although the violence was reportedly triggered by personal arguments, those arguments were used as a pretext to destroy ballot boxes in the majority of polling stations in Debar and to intimidate election officials and voters. During these incidents, gunshots were fired and at least one person was injured. As a result of the incidents in Debar, the head of the local Department of Internal Affairs was replaced.

Incidents also took place in a number of other municipalities. In Kondovo several people were wounded by gunshots, and one man later died of his injuries. Shootings also occurred in the municipalities of Tetovo, Gostivar, Dzepciste, Labunista, and (the predominantly ethnic-Macedonian municipality of) Mavrovi Anovi. In several other places, there were also reports of physical violence.

Destruction of ballot boxes was reported from a number of municipalities, including Bitola, Tetovo, Debar, Delogozdi, Tearce, and Brvenica. The ballot boxes were destroyed both by individuals and by groups of people belonging to various political parties.

There were also widespread reports of intimidation of polling officials and voters, some of which were witnessed by EOM observers. In and around many polling stations, groups of party activists tried to intimidate voters, often selectively granting or denying them access to the polling sites. Some of those persons were armed, and observers reported that in some cases, their actions were obviously being coordinated. Such incidents were reported mainly from the western municipalities and from a number of municipalities in and around Skopje, but there were also cases in the central and eastern

parts of the country. In a number of polling stations, party observers were forced to leave while voting took place or immediately before the start of the vote count.

C. TURNOUT

During the first round of voting, the nation-wide turnout was 59.2 percent.⁷ However, the turnout varied widely. In two municipalities (Bogovinje and Cucer-Sandevo), turnout was above 90 percent, and in another three municipalities, between 80 and 90 percent. Turnout was below 50 percent in 15 municipalities. The lowest turnout — less than 40 percent — was reported from the municipalities of Dzepeviste and Suto Orizari.

D. VOTING

During election day, EOM observers visited over 850 of the 2,973 polling stations, sometimes returning to the same polling station during the course of the day. Overall, observers reported positively on the process, assessing polling as well conducted in 40 percent and as satisfactory in another 38 percent of the stations visited.

However, observers reported a number of problems. Apart from the cases of intimidation and violence already mentioned, a few observers were witnesses to blatant cases of ballot box stuffing, while others were told of such irregularities.

Over 21 percent of observers reported group voting, i.e. more than one person using a voting booth at the same time. This practice was observed throughout the entire territory of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia regardless of the ethnic composition of a municipality. Such a high percentage of group voting is worrisome since it undermines the secrecy of the vote.

Just under nine percent of observations noted open voting, i.e. voters marking their ballots outside the voting booth. This occurrence was more prevalent in ethnic-Albanian areas (15 percent of observations) than in the rest of the country (five percent).

Some nine percent of observers noted proxy voting, i.e. someone voting on behalf of another person. In some cases, one person put ten or more ballots in the ballot box. Proxy voting was a particular problem in areas with a predominantly ethnic-Albanian population. In such areas, almost 16 percent of observation forms noted proxy voting, as opposed to under five percent in other municipalities.

Observers also noted that identity documents were not always checked before voters were handed voting material (eight percent of observations). Again, this was far more common in ethnic-Albanian areas (17 percent) than in the rest of the country (two percent).

Observers noted that unauthorized persons were often present in and around polling stations, sometimes interfering in the election process. In some instances, party representatives, rather than PB officials, seemed to be in command of the electoral

⁷ This is the figure for the election of mayors since no complete results for the council elections are available. The figure does not include the municipality of Debar, where voting was suspended, and the vote for the mayor of the City of Skopje since including this vote would mean counting some voters twice.

process. In a few instances, observers noted that PB members tried to influence the choice of voters.

Some observers reported practices aimed at intimidating voters to cast their ballot for a particular party. In Zelino, voters were made to show their unfolded ballots to the PB before putting them in the ballot box. Other observers reported that ballots had been marked with special symbols (such as flowers) or with pens of a particular color in order to establish who cast these ballots. One team reported from Dobrusevo municipality that ballots had not been shuffled and that PB officials were keeping track of the order in which people had voted — a serious violation of the secrecy of the vote.

A number of observers noted that ballot boxes were not properly sealed. In some cases, observers returned to polling stations where the boxes had been sealed, only to find the seals broken. In Kriva Palanka, one PB used a plastic bag instead of a ballot box for mobile voting.

A common comment by EOM observers was that voting booths were often inadequate. In many cases, makeshift screens of cardboard were used, which were too small and did not allow voters to vote in secrecy.

E. VOTE COUNT

EOM observers followed the vote count in 83 polling stations. Overall, they reported positively on the counting process, with 52 percent of the teams reporting that the count was very well conducted, and another 35 percent assessing the count as satisfactory. A total of 12 percent assessed the count as bad or very bad.

Several teams reported that while the count was conducted properly, there were strong indications of irregularities during election day. For example, some teams saw stacks of ballots folded together, a clear indication of ballot box stuffing. In Gostivar, ballot papers without serial numbers were found in ballot boxes during the count.

In many of the counts observed, the number of invalid ballots for the municipal council was significantly higher than that for the mayoral vote. In many cases voters had marked the party name or a candidate rather than circling the ordinal number of the list they wished to vote for. These ballots were deemed invalid even though the intention of these voters was perfectly clear.

Regrettably, in at least two cases, EOM observers were prevented from attending the vote count in a few instances.

F. TABULATION AND PUBLICATION OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Tabulation of election results rested within the responsibility of the individual MECs. No systematic effort was made to collect and publish election results at the central level. This created confusion that could have easily been avoided if the SEC had compiled and published results promptly on receipt from the MECs. As a result, political parties and coalitions published their own results, compiled from count observations of their representatives and observers at the polling station level. Many of those results later turned out to be incorrect, which further contributed to the confusion over who won exactly how many votes in which municipalities. The slow and incomplete publication of

election results unnecessarily undermined confidence in the election process and in the performance of election officials.

VII. ELECTION DAY — ROUND TWO, 24 SEPTEMBER 2000

A. GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

On 24 September, the second round of mayoral elections was carried out in 54 municipalities, while in 27 municipalities the first round of voting was repeated partially or completely.

The second round of voting showed improvement in some areas but was still marked by tension, major irregularities, acts of intimidation, and violence in a significant number of municipalities. In several municipalities, voting had to be suspended. In at least 14 polling stations, ballot boxes were destroyed, sometimes immediately before the vote count. In at least one polling station the voters register was stolen during election day.

Unlike in the first round, acts of violence and intimidation were not limited to a particular region. Rather, such occurrences appear to have been most severe and widespread in municipalities where the race between the main political forces was particularly close. The most serious and numerous cases were reported from Strumica, Struga, Ohrid and some Skopje municipalities. In Strumica, guns were fired, and at least one person had to be hospitalized after having been beaten with a gun. In Strumica and in Struga, groups of party supporters intimidated voters and in some cases prevented them from voting. In at least one polling station in Ohrid, the polling board reportedly was forced at gunpoint to fill in ballots for the ruling parties at the beginning of the count. In Suto Orizari, a member of Parliament was physically assaulted and injured. During some of those incidents, police were present but failed to intervene.

In most municipalities in the west of the country — including Debar where the most violent incidents had occurred during the first round — there was marked improvement over the first round. However, the PDP decision to withdraw from the race meant that in most of those municipalities there was no competition. Voters boycotted the election in Kondovo municipality in protest over the death of one resident who was shot on 10 September and later died of his injuries.

B. VOTING

On 24 September, EOM observers reported from over 500 polling stations in 61 municipalities. Their overall assessment was positive, with 40 percent of the observations being evaluated as very good, and 39 percent as satisfactory.

However, in over 25 percent of all cases, group voting was observed, eight percent of reports noted open voting, and five percent, proxy voting. Voters' identities were not checked in seven percent of all polling stations observed.

Observers again witnessed blatant cases of ballot box stuffing. In several municipalities, the turnout differed widely from one polling station to another. In some cases, this was an obvious indication of ballot box stuffing. In one building in Skopje-Centar with three polling stations serving the same area, voters were divided alphabetically. Still, turnout

in two of those polling stations was around 80 percent when observers visited, while it was around 50 percent in the third polling station. In a different polling station in Skopje, PB members told one observer that turnout was 47 percent, but some 80 percent of names on the voters register had already been marked as having voted. Other observers reported similar discrepancies between reported turnout and the number of voters marked as having already voted.

Observers again commented on the presence of unauthorized persons in and around polling stations, many of whom interfered in the voting process. In some cases, observers saw the same persons who had been intimidating voters two weeks earlier.

Even more often than in the first round of voting, observers noted that voters were pressured into showing their unfolded ballots to polling officials before putting them in the ballot box. Observers also reported cases where voters were told to use pens of a specific color to mark the ballots, to mark the ballots with special symbols, or to fold them in a particular way so that their voting behavior could be checked. One team reported that in one polling station, voters systematically folded their ballots the wrong way around, allowing polling officials to see whom they had voted for. Observers also reported instances where ballots had not been shuffled at the beginning of election day or were distributed face up, allowing polling officials to see the serial numbers. Such irregularities were not limited to a particular region but occurred in various places throughout the country.

EOM observers reported that in a number of instances, party representatives and non-partisan domestic observers were intimidated and sometimes forced to leave polling stations. In Strumica, journalists from media known to be critical of the ruling parties were intimidated and prevented from performing their work.

C. VOTE COUNT

EOM observers followed the vote count in 42 polling stations. Overall, they reported positively on the count, with 54 percent of the teams reporting that it was very well conducted, and another 37 percent assessing the count as satisfactory. Just under 10 percent assessed the count as very bad.

Several teams reported that while the count was conducted properly, there were again strong indications of irregularities during election day. One team reported that although 230 voters had been marked as having voted, there were around 360 ballots in the ballot box. Other observers reported that stacks of ballots folded inside each other were found in the ballot box. In the most severe incident witnessed during a count, one observer reported that in the middle of the count in a polling station in Gazi Baba (Skopje), the PB chairman tore up all ballots and then left the polling station.

Regrettably, EOM observers were again prevented from attending the count in a few instances.

D. TABULATION AND PUBLICATION OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS

As after the first round of the municipal elections, there was no central tabulation or announcement of election results for the second round of voting. Again, this lessened the public trust in the electoral process.

VIII. ELECTION DAY — PARTIAL RE-RUNS, 8 OCTOBER 2000

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission completed its activities on 30 September 2000, thus the elections that took place in 35 municipalities on 8 October were not observed.

This polling represented either a repetition of the second round resulting from successful complaints, or simply the second round of mayoral elections after having repeated the first round because of irregularities. Around 150,000 registered voters were invited to vote again. In some municipalities the difference between candidates was only a few hundred votes, as in Ohrid; the difference was even less in Makedonski Brod. In Gradsko only 33 votes separated the candidates. In each of these places, increased party involvement raised tensions among party activists.

The political assessment of 8 October voting, coordinated by the OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission to Skopje, showed that, in some municipalities, elections took place in a calm atmosphere, with a discernible improvement in the conduct of proceedings in the polling stations. In the municipality of Debar in the west of the country — the scene of shootings and the closing of all 24 polling stations during the first round — the contest between the DPA and the local branch of the PDP for the office of mayor was conducted peacefully and without incident.

However, several incidents, irregularities, and the use of firearms again overshadowed these overall positive impressions. During the early afternoon near one polling station in Ohrid, a confrontation between rival supporters of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM escalated into violence and shooting. Five people were injured, one of whom was hospitalized. In the Skopje municipality of Gazi Baba, in the same polling station where the voter register was stolen two weeks earlier, the voter register was again removed by force. And in Gradsko voting did not take place at all, since the members of the polling board failed to appear.

IX. THE POST-ELECTION PHASE

A. TABULATION AND PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

There was again no central tabulation or announcement of election results, causing the same confusion as after the first two rounds.

B. POST-ELECTION COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Parties and candidates filed a number of complaints and appeals after both rounds of voting. The EOM notes that the Election Law contains provisions that make it difficult for authorities to address such cases in a timely manner.

Under Article 59 of the Election Law, MECs have one day to announce unofficial results, and three days to announce the final results. Proponents of mayoral candidates or councilor lists then have three days to file a complaint with the MEC. The MEC decision on the complaint can then be appealed to the SEC, which must decide within 48 hours.

This decision in turn can be appealed to the Supreme Court within another 48 hours. The Supreme Court must decide on that appeal within 72 hours.

One obvious shortcoming is that the law does not specify a time frame within which MECs must deal with the initial complaint. But even without a time specified for MECs to decide on the initial complaint, the tabulation of official results and the complaints and appeals procedure can take up to 11 days. Since re-runs were held at the same time as the second round, i.e. 14 days after the first round, there was no time in some cases to produce the required election materials, and the re-runs had to be postponed.

X. FINAL RESULTS

Final results for the September 2000 municipal elections were published individually by the 123 MECs and the Election Commission of the City of Skopje. The SEC did not publish complete and comprehensive results. Since official results from all the municipalities were not available even a month after the second round of voting, it was not possible to include them in this report.

Available data show that the Joint Opposition received the largest share of the vote in the first round on 10 September, both for the mayoral and the council races. The "Za Makedonija-Zaedno" coalition won around 38 percent of the mayoral vote, compared to around 27 percent for the VMRO-DPMNE/DA coalition. The DPA received around 13 percent of the mayoral vote, and the PDP, around 6 percent. No other party or coalition received more than 3 percent. The municipal council results were largely similar to the mayoral ones.

The ruling parties (VMRO-DPMNE and DA) won most races in the second round of voting. Thus the VMRO-DPMNE/DA coalition ultimately won around half of the mayors' positions countrywide. However, many of the municipalities won by the ruling parties were in rural areas or small towns. By contrast, the Joint Opposition won most big cities, including the capital Skopje. The Joint Opposition also received the largest share of council seats nationwide.

In municipalities with an ethnic Albanian majority, the DPA emerged as the clear winner, taking most mayor races.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the electoral framework and process and to increase public trust in future elections, OSCE/ODIHR offers the following recommendations and stands ready to assist the authorities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in implementing them:

A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. To improve the legal framework, the option of integrating the various election laws and procedures in a single election code should be seriously explored. This would

also ensure that administrative and technical arrangements would be the same for all types of elections.⁸

2. The role of the State Election Commission in municipal elections should be clearly defined by the law. Among others, the SEC should be tasked with publishing comprehensive final results in a timely manner.
3. The requirement for independent candidates to collect at least 200 signatures should be amended to take into account the size of the municipality.
4. There should be a provision in the law allowing for withdrawal of certain number of candidates without disqualifying the whole list.
5. Time frames for candidate registration and for opening of campaign bank accounts should be harmonized.

B. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

1. As long as the general funding situation of municipal authorities is not improved, the government should be prepared to provide money for election-related expenses promptly to municipalities requiring financial assistance.
2. The SEC should be given a stronger mandate that provides decisive authority over the election administration, power to regulate the election process, enforce decisions, and apply sanctions.
3. Political composition of municipal councils should be used as a guideline for appointment of MECs and PBs for local elections.
4. Standardized training should be introduced for election officials at all levels well in advance of polling day.

C. CAMPAIGN AND MEDIA

1. Legislation regulating the State media should be expanded to include not only equal time for free advertising, but to ensure independent and balanced coverage in news and other programs. An appropriate enforcement mechanism, with penalties if necessary, should be provided. In general, there should be greater editorial freedom and a strengthened role for journalists to provide critical analysis.
2. Parties should be prohibited from exerting pressure on voters. In particular, parties should not use their influence over public and communal enterprises in order to pressure or intimidate supporters of other political parties. Serious penalties should be defined for any violence.
3. Excess of campaign spending limit resulting in disqualifying candidates should be precisely defined.

⁸ The OSCE/ODIHR Generic Guidelines on Election Legislative Framework (to be published in December 2000) could serve as further reference for the amendments of the election laws.

4. A threshold of votes received required for reimbursement of campaign expenses of mayor candidates should be established.

D. VOTING PROCEDURES/ELECTION DAY ISSUES

1. National and local authorities, as well as political parties, must ensure that voters can cast their votes free from intimidation and pressure. The law should specify a clear prohibition against unauthorized persons being present inside polling stations, and should provide adequate enforcement mechanisms. In case of violence or serious intimidation in or around polling stations, police should respond in a more timely manner, and the law should provide criminal penalties for any such interference.
2. The political parties should limit their activities on voting day to their presence as members of boards and observers, as prescribed in the law. Various groups of party activists serve no constructive function around polling stations and present a possible threat to the peaceful conduct of elections.
3. Polling officials must act decisively against proxy and group voting. Voter education campaigns should be initiated, in particular in minority areas, to target these practices, stressing their illegality. Appropriate legal penalties should be prescribed against persons who vote on behalf of others, or violate the secrecy of the ballot by voting with another person or persons. Posters emphasizing these points could be placed prominently in polling stations.
4. In order to safeguard the secrecy of the vote, ballots should not contain serial numbers, unless they are printed on detachable coupons or stubs.
5. Votes should be considered valid as long as the voter's will is expressed in a clear and unambiguous way.
6. Ballots for mayoral and council elections should be clearly distinguishable in order to help voters determine which ballot to put in which ballot box.
7. Polling Boards should receive only one copy of the voters register in order to improve the process on election day and to reduce the potential for confusion and errors.

E. ELECTORAL DISPUTES

1. Breaches of election legislation and the criminal code must be investigated in a timely, vigorous, and thorough manner. The legislation should define electoral offenses in greater detail, and clarify the body responsible for implementing and enforcing legal provisions and SEC decisions.⁹
2. Election complaint review time frame should be adjusted to the second round of elections. A deadline for complaint review on the MEC level should be clearly stipulated.

⁹ For further reference, see OSCE/ODIHR "Resolving Election Disputes", Warsaw 2000.

ANNEX 1 MEDIA MONITORING

The Election Observation Mission carried out a media monitoring project between 14 August and 7 September, and between 11 and 21 September. Between 8 and 10 September, and 22 and 24 September, monitoring was limited to possible violations of the campaign silence. The media monitoring team analyzed broadcasts of the First Channel of Macedonian Television (MTV1) and private A1 Television on a daily basis. The monitoring team also analyzed seven daily newspapers: *Nova Makedonija*, *Dnevnik*, *Makedonija Denes*, *Utrinski Vesnik*, *Vecer*, *Vest*, and *Fakti*. *Fakti* is one of two Albanian-language dailies published in Skopje; *Nova Makedonija* and *Vecer* are published by the “NIP Nova Makedonija” publishing house, in which the government controls the majority of shares.¹⁰

Electronic Media

Between the two electronic media monitored, there were pronounced differences in terms of both campaign and political coverage. Apart from campaign coverage in the news, both broadcasters provided paid political advertising, paid political broadcasts, and other political and informative programs. Before the first round, both channels also broadcast debates, especially A1.

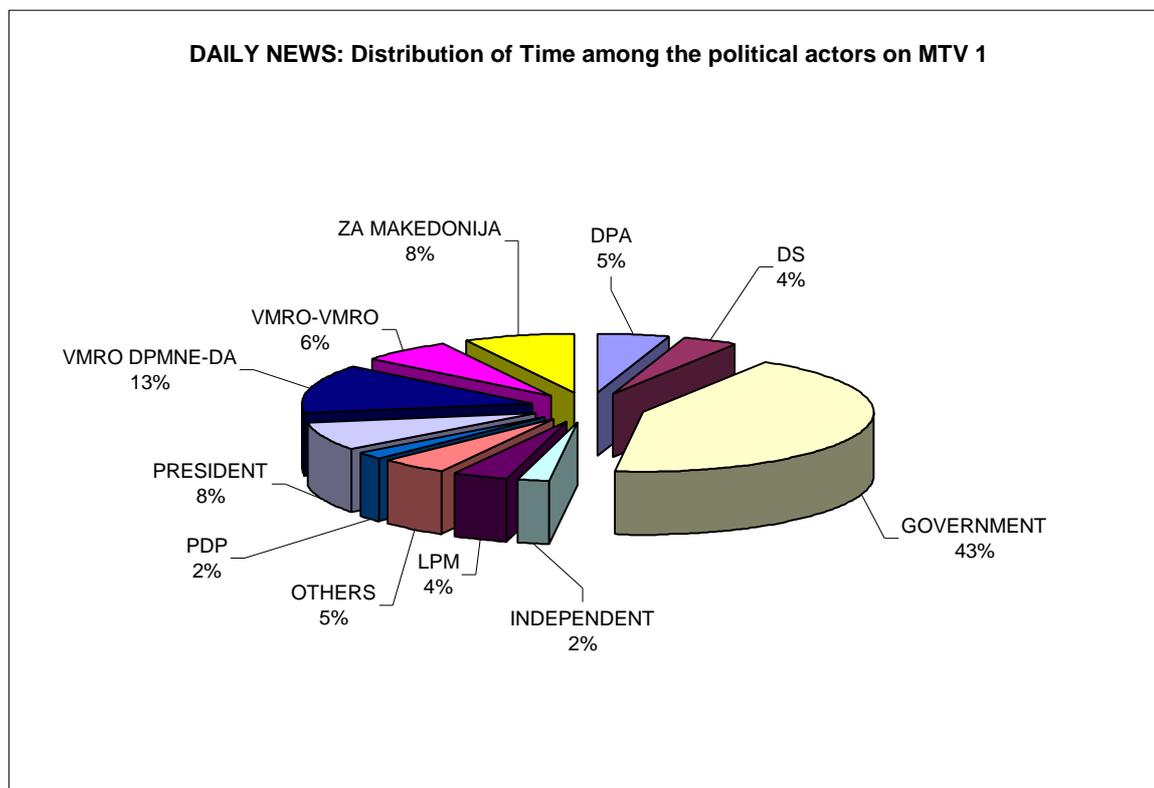
MTV1 distributed free airtime to the contestants in the municipal elections before the first round in an equal way, as stipulated by law. Paid political advertising on MTV1 was used almost exclusively by the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition (91 percent), while paid political broadcasts were used mainly by the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition and the government (44 and 51 percent, respectively). Despite a recommendation by the Broadcasting Council, which oversees electronic media operations, not to “air interviews with representatives of Government institutions who are not candidates in the local elections within the paid political advertisements,” Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski and three government ministers (all from VMRO–DPMNE) participated directly in paid political programs.

Apart from the free and paid advertising, MTV failed to meet its obligation as a public broadcaster funded from the State budget. In its news programs, MTV1 devoted 48 percent of its domestic policy coverage to government activities. Another 13 percent was devoted to the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition, and five percent to the DPA. As with the government, the tone of coverage was often positive. By contrast, the “Za Makedonija–Zaedno” coalition received only eight percent of coverage.

A1, as a private broadcaster, did not allocate free airtime. Paid advertising and paid political programs on that channel were mostly used by the “Za Makedonija–Zaedno” coalition, but also by the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition, the LPM, and the Democratic Alliance. Between the two rounds, only the two main coalitions used paid advertising on A1, and only the Joint Opposition had paid political broadcasts. In its news coverage, A1 was more balanced than MTV1. Of A1’s domestic political news coverage, 36 percent was devoted to the government, 18 percent to the opposition coalition, 14 percent to the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition, and 12 percent to the VMRO–VMRO. At the same time,

¹⁰ Technically, 32 percent of the shares in “NIP Nova Makedonija” are owned by the State. However, the government controls a total of around 70 percent of the shares because shares that were given to the employees but were never paid for are controlled by a government agency.

there were more critical reports on the government, the ruling parties, and the VMRO–VMRO than on MTV1.



Print Media

Political coverage of the campaign period by daily newspapers showed that the Macedonian-language dailies devoted roughly the same amount of space to individual political subjects. However, there were distinct differences in the tone of that coverage. There was also a distinct difference between government-controlled *Nova Makedonija* and the other newspapers.

Nova Makedonija gave extensive coverage to the campaign, but its treatment was on the whole unbalanced. Some 29 percent of the space was devoted to the government, and another 13 percent to the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition. The DPA received two percent. Coverage of the government and the ruling parties was largely neutral and sometimes positive. By contrast, the “Za Makedonija–Zaedno” coalition received 22 percent of space, and the VMRO–VMRO, 11 percent. However, in both cases more than half of the coverage was in a negative context.

Vecer, although published by the same company as *Nova Makedonija*, showed a more balanced approach. While the quantitative breakdown was roughly the same as in *Nova Makedonija*, the tone towards the Joint Opposition was less negative (seven percent), and there was also 14 percent of positive coverage. Negative reporting on the VMRO–VMRO was also less pronounced. While not critical of the government, 16 percent of the space *Vecer* devoted to the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition was negative in tone.

Of the private newspapers, *Makedonija Denes* was most critical of the government. During the monitoring period, 54 percent of the daily's coverage of the government was negative. The corresponding figures for the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition, the DPA, and the President were 33, 35, and 39 percent, respectively. At the same time, some 11 percent of the space devoted to the Joint Opposition was positive in tone.

The opposition-leaning *Utrinski Vesnik* was also critical of the government, but not to the same degree (21 percent of government coverage was negative). At the same time, *Utrinski Vesnik* was more critical of the ruling parties (especially the DPA) and the President.

Dnevnik provided extensive and mainly balanced coverage of campaign activities and other political events. The government, the parties supporting it, and the Joint Opposition all received some negative coverage, but on the whole *Dnevnik's* coverage was neutral. The only exception was the DPA, which received some 25 percent of negative coverage.

The tabloid *Vest* also showed a relatively balanced approach, although it was critical of the VMRO–DPMNE/DA coalition and the President (22 and 27 percent of negative coverage, respectively).

The Albanian-language daily *Fakti* differed strongly from the other dailies by focusing much more on events within the ethnic-Albanian community. Some 40 percent of its coverage was devoted to the DPA, and another 22 percent to the PDP. The government received 14 percent of coverage, and the Joint Opposition, nine percent. *Fakti's* tone of coverage was largely neutral, although of the DPA's coverage, 13 percent was positive, while the Joint Opposition received 42 percent of negative coverage, and the PDP, 14 percent.