



ODIHR SPECIAL ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION Republic of North Macedonia – Early Parliamentary Elections, 15 July 2020

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The 15 July 2020 early parliamentary elections were generally administered effectively amid adjustments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but legal stability was undermined by substantial revisions to the Electoral Code and subsequent *ad hoc* regulations enacted during the state of emergency. The campaign, although negative in tone, was genuinely competitive and participants could deliver their messages despite limitations on traditional outreach. Media coverage of the elections lacked critical assessment of platforms and provisions regarding paid political advertisement favoured the three largest parties. Election day proceeded smoothly, despite technical challenges in publishing results and concerns related to voter registration.

Early parliamentary elections were initially scheduled for 12 April 2020.¹ Amid the global outbreak of COVID-19, on 18 March the president declared a 30-day state of emergency and on 21 March the elections were suspended by a governmental decree, which provided that the electoral process would resume from the day the state of emergency was lifted. The state of emergency was extended four times, on the final occasion for only eight days for the purpose of re-scheduling the elections.² A caretaker government comprising representatives of ruling and opposition parties had previously been established in January 2020 following the resignation of the prime minister in anticipation of the early elections and was granted extraordinary legislative powers. A large number of challenges to the legitimacy of presidential decisions introducing an emergency state without parliamentary approval and of the legislative powers vested upon the government were brought to the Constitutional Court. The ultimate election date of 15 July was determined by protracted negotiations between political parties related to the need to reconstitute a permanent government and parliament and safety measures for conducting elections during the pandemic.

The elections were conducted under a legal framework which was substantially amended on the eve of the announcement of the elections, contrary to international good practice.³ Amendments introduced into the Electoral Code in February 2020 partially addressed some ODIHR recommendations on issues such as voter registration, transparency of election dispute resolution, deadlines for campaign finance reporting, and campaign oversight.⁴ Still, most ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those pertaining to the universality and equality of the vote in the electoral district abroad, revision of electoral district boundaries by an independent body, rights of persons with disabilities, and an effective campaign finance audit. The persisting inconsistencies, gaps and ambiguous formulations undermine legal certainty and require further substantive revision.⁵

¹ The motion to call early parliamentary elections was triggered by the European Council's decision in October 2019 to not open negotiations on the country's accession to the European Union (EU), which was widely regarded as a severe disappointment for the ruling party and prompted the government to resign. On 16 February, the speaker dissolved the parliament and called for early elections.

² The Constitution allows introduction of the state of emergency only in case of major natural disaster or epidemics. Furthermore, the 15 June decision was adopted two days after the previous decision had expired, which, however, did not lead to any election-related activities, at odds with the binding governmental decree of 21 March.

³ Paragraph II.2.b. of the [2002 Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters](#) and paragraph II.58 of its Explanatory Report.

⁴ See previous [ODIHR election reports in North Macedonia](#), including an April 2020 interim report.

⁵ Inconsistent regulations include the norms on maintenance and modification of the voter register, compilation of voter lists, voter registration in the out-of-country electoral district, unaligned deadlines for voter and candidate registration, campaigning and campaign deadlines, determination of prices for political advertising and distribution of political advertising quotas among campaign participants, distribution of budgetary compensation for campaign expenditures, reporting on in-kind contributions for campaign purposes, scope of financial reporting, closure of campaign accounts, division of dispute-resolution competencies between election management bodies.

Despite judicial interpretation that legislative powers of the government during an emergency state shall be calibrated to the emergency needs, the binding governmental decrees covered a vast area of public life, including electoral procedures within the competence of other institutions under the Electoral Code, substituting their decisions.⁶ The decrees regulated the resumption and conduct of the electoral process, the validity of previously completed procedures, voter registration, campaigning in the media, and established standards and procedures for compliance with health protocols, including an additional voting day for COVID-19 positive voters and those in self-isolation. The governmental regulations on indoor and outdoor events lacked consistency and consolidation, undermining legal certainty and implementation. Overall, the constant generation of amendments to the decrees tainted the general understanding of their substance and validity.⁷

The elections were administered by a three-tiered structure led by the State Election Commission (SEC), which is supported by a professional secretariat. The election administration carried out its duties within legal deadlines, despite complications caused by the suspension of the electoral process and concerns raised publicly by the SEC during the state of emergency in relation to the electoral calendar. The SEC adopted decisions in a collegial manner, often featuring substantive debate, in sessions which were open to observers and were live-streamed on the website of the state-run Macedonian Information Agency (MIA) and on the SEC's Facebook page. Most SEC sessions were announced with short notice but decisions and minutes were published on the SEC website in a timely manner, contributing to the overall transparency of the process. However, decisions on complaints were not consistently published, and the online application for complaints was not functional throughout the election process, despite previous ODIHR recommendations to address this issue. Insufficient permanent legal and IT staff reduced the overall operational capacity of the SEC, despite prior ODIHR recommendations.

ODIHR SEAM interlocutors generally expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of the SEC, though some questioned the partisan structure of the commission. Due to the suspension of the electoral activities, the SEC operated under a mandate extended by government decree to six months from the holding of the elections. The SEC comprises seven members (including three women) nominated by parliamentary political parties (four by ruling parties and three by the opposition). Prior to the determination of the election date, SEC members were strongly divided along party lines regarding the legal basis for setting a date, which deprived the Commission of the quorum necessary to endorse a new election calendar.⁸

Lower tiers of election administration include 80 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and 3,480 Electoral Boards (EBs). All MEC members and three of five EB members are randomly selected by the SEC from among state and municipal employees. An outdated database of state employees, noted also in prior ODIHR election reports, slowed the process of replacing a significant number of commission members, necessitated first by a government decision in March to retract some 3,200 medical staff in response to COVID-19 needs, and subsequently by the resignation of a comparable number of additional MEC and EB members who generally cited COVID-19 concerns or health status. However, these complications did not appear to result in significant operational issues in the preparations for the elections.

⁶ The government redistributed the quotas for paid political advertising in broadcast media and changed budgetary compensation for paid political advertising, originally within the competences of the Agency of Audio and Audio Visual Services (AVMS) and the SEC respectively.

⁷ Paragraph 58 of the 2017 [Venice Commission Rule of Law Checklist](#) states that “[...]the law must, where possible, be proclaimed in advance of implementation and be foreseeable as to its effects: it must also be formulated with sufficient precision and clarity to enable legal subjects to regulate their conduct in conformity with it”.

⁸ For example, the SEC president and vice-president failed to convene a session to set a new electoral calendar upon the conclusion of the penultimate state of emergency, in advance of the then-scheduled 5 July election date. The SEC rules of internal procedure require the presence of either the president or vice-president for a quorum.

The SEC also formed 67 special EBs to conduct early voting on 13 July for COVID-19 positive voters and those in self-isolation. The special EBs comprised three healthcare workers and two political party representatives. The SEC faced substantial challenges in forming the special EBs; of 300 health workers initially selected to work on the boards, over a third requested an exemption.

On 22 June, the Commission for Infectious Diseases endorsed a health protocol for administration of the election day procedures. Development of the document was preceded by consultations with the SEC and civil society organizations, although according to several interlocutors these consultations were limited and recommendations were not fully incorporated. On the basis of the protocol, the SEC also approved instructions on voting day procedures, as well as on registration and voting for COVID-19 positive voters in quarantine, and related protective instructions for election officials. However, a gap in the training schedule caused by the suspension of the elections created challenges in assuring systematic training on health-related adjustments to the election day procedures; some complimentary trainings were available. The SEC also reviewed polling station premises to accommodate distancing requirements envisaged by the protocols, though acknowledged that in many cases compliance was not possible due to lack of adequate available sites. Positively, the SEC conducted a comprehensive voter education campaign that informed on health-related adjustments to election day procedures, and which was disseminated in several languages in both traditional and online media.

Citizens aged 18 years or older by election day with permanent residence had the right to vote; those deprived of legal capacity by a court decision on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability are disenfranchised, contrary to international obligations and prior ODIHR recommendations.⁹ In line with previous ODIHR recommendations, the Ministry of Interior provided the SEC with the list of voters whose ID cards expired between the announcement of the elections and the election day, enhancing the inclusivity of voter register. However, in order to receive a ballot, all voters were still required to present a valid ID or a passport.¹⁰

By law, the SEC was primarily responsible for compiling the voter register on the basis of updates provided by the Ministry of Interior, the Office for Management of Registers of Birth, Marriages and Death, and the courts. Before the suspension of the electoral process the public inspection of the voter list was completed and copies of the voter list were submitted to political parties. While the new electoral calendar allowed for updates of the register to exclude deceased persons and include citizens turning 18, no period of public inspection was introduced for this new subset. On 1 July, the voter list was closed and included 1,814,263 citizens, of whom 83,054 are registered as temporarily residing abroad. Such voters are recorded in a separate list that is provided to all EBs. In addition, by the legal deadline of 8 July, the SEC registered 759 voters who were COVID-19 positive or in self-isolation for early voting on 13 July, and 10,822 requests for mobile voting on 14 July at home or in hospitals, residential care institutions, and penitentiaries. According to official statistics, 989 persons tested positive for COVID-19 or entered self-isolation after the 8 July deadline, and were thus disenfranchised. Organization of out-of-country voting is based on active registration requiring a threshold equal to the votes needed to win a seat in the last elections. The registration process was completed on 17 March, prior to the suspension of the elections, and the threshold, established for these elections at 6,534 registered voters, was not met.

Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors raised concerns regarding the accuracy of the voter list, generally positing that the number of registered voters exceeds the number of citizens with permanent residence, thereby inflating the abstention rate. Longstanding structural issues such as lack of standardization of address data and harmonization across institutions, as identified in prior ODIHR reports, remain unaddressed. The voter registration process was further affected by the SEC's limited IT capacity, and as such no recent comprehensive quality control of the voter register has taken place.

⁹ According to the State Election Commission, this restriction affected some 880 citizens.

¹⁰ Expired passports were acceptable provided the validity ended over the period of the state of emergency.

Candidate registration was completed between 12 and 20 March, prior to the suspension of the elections, in an inclusive process. For these elections, the SEC launched a new online application for submission of candidate lists. Candidates could be nominated by registered political parties and coalitions, as well as by groups of voters, in-country or abroad. Candidates nominated by voters needed to collect at least 1,000 supporting signatures of voters residing in the respective district. For the first time and in line with a previous ODIHR recommendation, supporting signatures of voters could be collected at notaries' offices in addition to authorized locations in front of SEC employees. By the end of the registration period, no group of voters successfully nominated a list, as none met the signature requirement. The SEC ultimately registered 12 political parties and 3 coalitions fielding a total of 1,598 candidates on 78 lists.¹¹ All submitted lists met the required 40 per cent representation of each gender; some exceeded this requirement.

The official campaign period opened on 24 June and ended at midnight on 12 July, prior to the first day of early voting. A series of government decrees outlined safety measures to be applied at public meetings, including the use of hand sanitizer, social distancing and mask-wearing. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered the style of campaign as parties replaced traditional rallies with small-scale meetings and limited door-to-door canvassing. Despite the circumstances, parties campaigned actively and were able to deliver their messages. Contestants relied extensively on social media, posting videos of local meetings addressed by candidates and party leaders. Numerous campaign ads were aired in broadcast and social media and billboards were widely visible. Key campaign issues included NATO and EU accession, judicial reform, the economy, social welfare and healthcare.

The campaign was marked by negative rhetoric, at the expense of substantive exchanges. The advertisements of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) included personal attacks on the leader of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), while the SDSM warned of a return to the “regime” of the former VMRO-DPMNE prime minister. A series of leaked clandestine recordings of political leaders further contributed to the negative tone. The proposal by the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) of an ethnic-Albanian candidate for prime minister caused heated debate both within and between ethnic communities.

The Electoral Code contains detailed provisions to uphold the separation of the state and party, provide for the equitable use of public spaces and prohibit the abuse of state resources. On 18 June, the SEC organized the signing by election participants of a code for fair and democratic elections. On 29 June, the SEC president and the interior minister jointly called on electoral participants to comply with the law, warning of sanctions for pressuring, coercing or bribing voters. The ODIHR SEAM noted isolated cases of ministers from different parties blurring their state functions and political activities. Claims were also made by opposition parties of attempts to politically capitalize on social welfare programmes and aid distribution connected with the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent economic distress. No conclusive evidence of such misuse was presented to the ODIHR SEAM. Political parties also reported to the ODIHR SEAM cases of pressure on public officials, especially in the west of the country, including on police. In the last days before the elections there were several allegations of vote-buying in different parts of the country, involving socially vulnerable people, especially in the Roma community, and local prosecutors opened investigations.

Efforts by some parties to increase the prominence of women in their campaigns were noted. The SDSM campaign focused on the top two candidates in each electoral district, a man and a woman in each case.

¹¹ The coalitions include: the coalition of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) with BESA and a number of smaller parties, the coalition led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the coalition of two ethnic-Albanian parties – the Alliance for Albanians (AA) with AlternAtivA.

Women headed the VMRO-DPMNE list in two electoral districts. The positioning of women candidates on the electoral lists notwithstanding, women politicians were underrepresented in the media coverage of the campaign. Women constituted 42 per cent of registered candidates, yet ODIHR SEAM monitoring indicates that coverage of women politicians by media varied between 4 and 14 per cent of candidate coverage, while the remainder was devoted to male counterparts. Women candidates met by the ODIHR SEAM described a lack of support for prospective women leaders in internal party structures.

Election campaigns can be financed from monetary and in-kind donations from individuals and legal entities, donations to parties, membership fees, and bank loans earmarked for election campaign. Campaign expenditure is limited to some MKD 110 (approx. EUR 2) per registered voter in a district (minimum EUR 490,830 in district 3 and maximum 544,930 in district 1), but the paid political advertisements in the broadcast, print and online media are funded directly by the state through a separate fund which is administered by the SEC.¹²

The legal framework on campaign financing requires further harmonisation to eliminate gaps and inconsistencies. In particular, conflicting provisions concern the allowed value of donations for campaign purposes on campaign and party accounts, reporting on in-kind contributions, and harmonization of reporting timelines to ensure that State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) reports reflect audit findings.¹³

The agencies tasked with campaign oversight lack capacity due to insufficient budgeting and human resources, which undermined control over the accountability and transparency of campaign financing. For these elections, the SCPC maintained communications with civil society for information on alleged violations. Furthermore, the Commission strengthened its campaign oversight with the addition of 17 field monitors, provided with international assistance in the absence of adequate state funds, who collected evidence on campaign activities. However, the findings of the monitors were not made public, missing an opportunity to increase transparency.

Unclear provisions on interim reporting triggered varying interpretations of their scope. Most campaign participants assessed the interim reporting framework as superfluous and burdensome, as three interim reports must be submitted in short intervals to three institutions (SEC, SCPC, and State Audit Office). The obligation for mid-term disclosure of donations was effectively respected by 9 of 15 contestants and the SEC did not consistently publish contestants' interim reports, reducing transparency. The second report on donations was submitted by 10 of 15 contestants, who reported primarily private donations and membership fees. Failure of some participants to use established reporting templates obscured the origin of funds transferred from political party accounts, undermining uniform disclosure. February 2020 amendments to the Electoral Code shortened the deadline for submission of final campaign finance reports from four to three months after the elections.¹⁴

All ODIHR SEAM interlocutors assessed that significant improvements in media freedoms in recent years were not reinforced by systematic reforms in the media sector, such as ensuring the political neutrality of the public *Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT)* and the media regulator. Many interlocutors raised concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in the deterioration of already challenging employment conditions for journalists. Ongoing stagnation in the advertising market caused by the pandemic has further increased the dependence of media on owners and state subsidies.

¹² One Euro is equal to approximately 61 *Denar* (MKD).

¹³ The Electoral Code also maintains outdated provisions on state compensation for campaign expenditures to contestants whose candidates are elected.

¹⁴ Paragraph 200 of the [ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulations](#) recommends that “[r]eports on campaign financing should be turned into proper authorities within a period of no more than 30 days after the elections”.

The Electoral Code provides detailed regulation on the conduct of media from the announcement of elections through the campaign. All broadcasters and websites covering the elections are required to do so in a fair, balanced and unbiased manner. Newscasts of *MRT* during the campaign are subject to meticulous regulations, which were criticized by most ODIHR SEAM interlocutors as superfluous and undermining editorial independence. While both *MRT-1* and *MRT-2* TV channels complied with these obligations, the requirements resulted in VMRO-DPMNE and the coalition of Alliance of Albanians-AlternativA receiving slightly more coverage than the SDSM and the DUI. February 2020 amendments to the Electoral Code further compelled national broadcasters to supplement election coverage with sign language interpretation, but most broadcasters monitored by the ODIHR SEAM did not comply with this requirement.

Numerous debates and talk-shows were mainly used by the contestants as platforms for mutual personal criticism.¹⁵ The newscasts of all national broadcasters monitored by the ODIHR SEAM provided superficial coverage of the campaign activities, which was overshadowed by mutual accusations as well as by implications of the published recordings of political leaders. In-depth analytical reporting or policy-based discussions were largely absent from the coverage of the campaign, limiting the opportunity for voters to make an informed choice between distinct policy alternatives.

In their prime-time newscasts focused on the VMRO-DPMNE and the SDSM-led coalitions, two national private broadcasters, *Sitel* and *Telma*, provided each with equal proportions of, respectively, 31 and 21 per cent of politically relevant coverage, mainly neutral in tone. In the first two weeks of the campaign *Kanal 5* provided equal proportions of its coverage to the two major contestants; however, in the final week of the campaign, its coverage of the SDSM-led coalition increased in comparison to that allotted to VMRO-DPMNE. By contrast, *Alfa TV* strongly criticized the government and the ruling SDSM by allotting to them 28 and 40 per cent, respectively, of mainly negative and neutral coverage, while VMRO-DPMNE received 19 per cent of coverage, which was mainly neutral and positive in tone. A similar trend was also observed on *Alsat*, which provided some 32 per cent of predominantly negative coverage to the DUI.

Paid political advertisements are entirely subsidized by the state. The legal framework for the allocation of funds for paid time, and the distribution of maximum limits for such advertisements, was modified by a government decree enacted on 22 June, the last day of the state of emergency. The provisions favour the SDSM-led coalition, VMRO-DPMNE and the DUI, which were entitled to use solely for the purposes of paid political advertisements some EUR 800,000 each, while the other twelve contestants were entitled to only EUR 30,000 each.¹⁶ Contestants could not use party funds for the purpose of paid political advertisements, essentially blocking the possibility of buying any additional advertisement by the twelve electoral lists whose joint share of subsidies was significantly smaller than those granted to each of the three largest parties. Political advertisements in Google AdSense and in social media are not subsidized or specifically regulated. Whereas political parties used these campaign methods extensively, the lack of transparency of such tools renders any substantial audit impossible.

While the media regulator, the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AVMS), is obliged to monitor the presence of advertisements in the broadcast media, no verification or monitoring was conducted for online media. During the campaign the AVMS formally reminded broadcasters twice of the prohibition to feature children in contestants' promotional materials, after identifying advertisements that violated the provision.

¹⁵ During the official campaign period between June 24 and July 12 the ODIHR SEAM monitored the prime-time (from 18:00 till 0:00) of seven broadcasters: *MRT-1*, *MRT-2*, *Alfa*, *Alsat*, *Kanal 5*, *Sitel* and *Telma*.

¹⁶ The SDSM-led coalition, DUI and VMRO-DPMNE were entitled to purchase up to three minutes each in the hour of broadcast, other twelve political parties were entitled to a combined total of two minutes.

The ODIHR SEAM noted multiple breaches of the electoral silence in online media and to a lesser extent in traditional media. Furthermore, a number of political parties continued to advertise in online and social media during the silence period and paid negative advertisements in social media were also noted. The AVMS reacted to three violations of the electoral silence by broadcast media.

The SEC rejected 42 complaints on early campaigning as unsubstantiated by evidence, without undertaking to examine them on merits. The decisions were formalistic, identical in all cases, and lacked substantive reasoning, with formal decisions issued past the deadlines, which impeded effective legal remedy. For the first time, MECs had the competence to examine complaints about voting rights violations on election day and during early voting, and their decisions could be directly appealed to the Administrative Court. Due to parallel jurisdiction in the law, the SEC examined 21 cases previously decided by the MECs, and in some instances reached an opposing opinion.¹⁷ On the election day, some 40 complaints on individual voting rights were left exclusively for the MECs to review. The existence of parallel avenues for complaints resolution undermines legal certainty and contradicts international good practice.¹⁸ The mechanism to protect voting rights on the election day does not allow for effective remedy.

The SCPC established violations in two of five complaints alleging abuse of state resources.¹⁹ The Administrative Court rejected an appeal against a voter registration decision of a SEC regional office as unsubstantiated and recognized as unfounded an appeal against the SCPC decision on abuse of administrative resources. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability of the Administrative Court to hold public hearings and to form in a timely manner the judicial collegiums for election-related dispute resolution. Although the agencies responsible for election dispute resolution did not always publish decisions in a timely manner, most made efforts to ensure transparency by organising online conferencing of their sessions.

The Electoral Code provides for citizen, partisan and international observation. On 19 February, the SEC adopted a Code of Conduct for Observers, binding for all accredited groups, amended on 2 July to increase transparency and freedom of movement for observers. The SEC accredited 2,551 citizen and 102 international observers by the deadline. Representatives of multiple civil society and citizen observer organizations, including MOST, CIVIL Center for Freedom, and Inkluziva, observed key stages of the electoral process and its accessibility for persons with disabilities, contributing to the transparency of the process.

The ODIHR SEAM did not undertake systematic or comprehensive observation of early voting and election-day proceedings. On 15 July, in the limited number of polling stations visited, the voting was generally well administered, with EBs displaying sound knowledge of voting procedures. Some cases were noted of voters with new IDs not being included in voter lists. Minor operational issues were reported by the election administration.²⁰ Both the election administration and voters largely respected the health protocols, but some of the visited premises were not sufficiently spacious to permit for the recommended distance between persons. As the number of voters allowed into a polling station equaled the number of booths, the queues that ensued resulted in crowds in common spaces, particularly where

¹⁷ Some 30 complaints concerned voting rights of voters eligible to vote at home or those in self-isolation, and the SEC found violations in 9 cases.

¹⁸ See paragraph II.3.3.c of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters and paragraph II.3.3.97 of the Explanatory Report.

¹⁹ One case concerned usage of a state vehicle for campaigning by a minister, the other concerned unlawful distribution of public funds during the campaign based on a binding governmental decree, for which the SCPC initiated criminal proceedings. The SCPC rejected three complaints that alleged abuse of state resources, as the contested actions and decisions were outside the scope of campaign period restrictions.

²⁰ For example, a misprint of ballots in a polling station in Lipkovo municipality resulted in an interruption of voting, which was resumed upon clarification of the problem.

several polling stations were located in the same premises. The majority of visited polling stations could not be independently accessed for persons with physical disabilities.

The ODIHR SEAM received reports of vote-buying in different regions of the country, both in the days before and on election day, especially among the Roma community. The ODIHR SEAM also received reports of tension and pressure on voters around polling stations, notably in Kichevo and Saraj municipalities, as well as a reported violent incident in Zajas.

The SEC reported disaggregated turnout data throughout the day and began publishing preliminary results shortly after the close of polls, contributing to transparency. A new web-based application was introduced in these elections for the electronic transmission of interval turnout data as well as of preliminary results. The reporting of turnout data throughout the day was affected by temporary technical problems. On election night, the SEC president reported a cyber attack, which limited the capacity of the SEC to share results data on its website. The SEC adapted by communicating preliminary results data on a YouTube livestream.

*The English version of this report is the only official document.
Unofficial translations are available in Macedonian and Albanian.*

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Skopje, 16 July 2020 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is an assessment made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments, international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and with national legislation.

ODIHR has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the electoral process.

The ODIHR SEAM, headed by Laima Andrikiėnė, was deployed from 19 June and consists of a core team of nine international experts based in Skopje. The ODIHR SEAM did not carry out systematic or comprehensive observation of the voting, counting and tabulation proceedings on election day, in line with ODIHR's methodology for election assessment missions. Mission members did, however, visit a limited number of polling stations on election day.

The ODIHR SEAM wishes to thank the authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia for their invitation to observe the elections, and the State Election Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their assistance. They also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties, media, civil society organizations, and the resident international community for their co-operation.

For further information, please contact:

- Laima Andrikiėnė, Head of the ODIHR SEAM (+389 2 3222558), in Skopje;
- Katya Andrusz, ODIHR Spokesperson (+48 609 522 266), or
Keara Castaldo, ODIHR Election Adviser (+48 603 638 999), in Warsaw.

ODIHR SEAM Address:

Nikola Kljusev 6, 4th floor
1000, Skopje

tel: +389-2-3222558, e-mail: office@odihr.mk