



ODIHR ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION  
TO THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (SECOND ROUND)  
14 NOVEMBER 1999

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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

**Skopje, 15 November 1999** – This preliminary statement is issued by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, prior to the completion of the formal election process. A final report will be issued within one month of the final official election results have been declared.

This statement should be considered in conjunction with the statement issued by OSCE/ODIHR after the first round of voting.

**SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS**

**Based on the overall findings of the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission from the first and second round of the elections, it can be concluded that the electoral process was generally carried out satisfactorily, and in general accordance with OSCE commitments.**

**Whilst the election was carried out according to the law in the vast majority of the country's polling stations, a number of polling stations in the west of the country and around Skopje experienced irregularities. Moreover, extremely high voter turnout figures in some districts and some polling stations raise concerns that need to be addressed by the authorities. In order to verify the full legitimacy of these figures and to ensure full confidence in the results in all districts, the election authorities need to carefully scrutinize any and all reported irregularities, even in the absence of a formal complaint.**

**In conclusion, based on preliminary findings, the election process, including the conduct of the campaign and the voting and counting processes on the national level, was generally satisfactory. The Election Observation Mission will continue to monitor all claims in the post-election period.**

**FIRST ROUND RESULTS AND CLAIMS**

Two political parties, the Democratic Alternative (DA) and the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) claimed irregularities after the first round. The DA claimed that the official results contained discrepancies, such as an apparent increase in the total number of registered voters. Given the high likelihood for some small errors to occur during the manual tabulation process at the polling station level and the fact that the details of the official data are fully transparent, the State Election

Commission (SEC) explanation that the difference is due to minor errors in the Polling Election Board (PEB) minutes, appears to be reasonable.

The PDP raised questions to the Election Observation Mission regarding what they claimed was an illegitimately high turnout of voters in some polling stations in some districts in the west of the country and around Skopje. Some of the figures seem unrealistically high, but as the PDP chose not to make an official complaint at either the PEB or district level, the legal options, under the existing law, for addressing the concerns are limited. The SEC correctly removed some PEB presidents from their positions.

The Election Observation Mission would like to stress that if a political party has a claim regarding the process, the complaint must be made to the appropriate election authority or court. Otherwise the electoral authorities are not legally obliged to consider it. Making unofficial claims to the media is not a serious or constructive approach to solving alleged problems with the electoral process. Further, political parties have a legal responsibility to ensure that their designated representatives on PEBs are present on election day, and DEC's have a responsibility to ensure that the PEBs are properly constituted, as this is one of the main guarantees of the process.

## THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND MEDIA COVERAGE – SECOND ROUND

The campaign for the second round of the election, was markedly more negative in tone. However, no election-related incidents were reported.

Media monitoring showed a noticeably more partisan coverage by some TV stations and newspapers. MRTV, the public-service broadcaster, continued to cover the campaign in its entirety. However, it is regrettable that MRTV 1 used its news programmes to focus extensively on the activities and achievements of the government, whilst many stories including criticism of government policy and considered newsworthy by other channels, were noticeably absent from its news programming.

Monitoring showed that Sitel TV, a private TV channel, devoted a high proportion of its news programming, and political commentary, to criticism of the government. Other monitored electronic media (A1, Telma, Channel 5, TV Era) were largely neutral in their coverage.

In the print media, *Nova Makedonija*, a largely publicly-owned newspaper, continued its biased coverage in favour of Boris Trajkovski, the VMRO-DPMNE candidate. *Utrinski Vesnik*, meanwhile, exhibited a strong bias towards Tito Petkovski of the opposition SDSM. It was noted that the coverage by *Dnevnik* was particularly well balanced.

If any decisions are taken in the future regarding new regulations for media coverage of the election campaign, the special responsibilities of publicly-owned media need to be made clear. It should also be stressed that public media should serve the interests of the public and not of the government of the day.

## ELECTION DAY – SECOND ROUND

The decision by the PDP to withdraw their members from some PEBs is extremely regrettable. The observation mission urged the PDP not to take this action, stressing their legal responsibility to fulfil their obligations to the formal electoral process. Given that members of some other parties were also absent from the PEBs in some instances, it should be stressed that the failure of any political party to

fulfil its polling station duties is an abrogation of their responsibility, and serves only to undermine the electoral process.

In the large majority of districts observers reported that the process was generally carried out according to the law. However in a number of polling stations in some districts, predominantly in the west of the country and in some districts around Skopje, there was large scale proxy voting and instances of multiple voting.

The Election Observation Mission would like to draw to the attention of the election authorities the extremely high voter turnout figures, in areas such as Lipkovo and Tetovo, as well as the extremely high turnout rates and irregularities in some polling stations, in areas such as Makedonski Brod, Gostivar, Tetovo, Arachinovo, Lipkovo and Studenicani. The election authorities should address any concerns raised, in order to verify the full legitimacy of these figures and ensure full confidence in the process.

It is vital that all reported irregularities are seriously considered by the relevant electoral authority. Given the reluctance of some PEB members to formally lodge a complaint against the process in some instances, it is advisable that even in the absence of official PEB complaints, the election authorities attempt to ascertain the extent of the problems.

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*This assessment is based upon the reports of 11 long-term experts from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and some 105 short-term observers from 25 participating States of the OSCE. On election day, observers reported from 725 polling stations in 77 districts.*

*The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission has been present in the country since 21 September 1999. Mr. Mark Stevens is the Head of the Mission.*

*The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Election Commission for their support of the observation.*

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