FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA:
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
JULY 2006

Report
by
Tom Røseth

NORDEM Report 14/2006
NORDEM, the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights, is a programme of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), and has as its main objective to actively promote international human rights. NORDEM is jointly administered by NCHR and the Norwegian Refugee Council. NORDEM works mainly in relation to multilateral institutions. The operative mandate of the programme is realised primarily through the recruitment and deployment of qualified Norwegian personnel to international assignments that promote democratisation and respect for human rights. The programme is responsible for the training of personnel before deployment and reporting on completed assignments and plays a role in research related to areas of active involvement. The vast majority of assignments are channeled through the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

NORDEM Report is a series of reports documenting NORDEM activities and is published jointly by NORDEM and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights.

Series editor: Hege Mørk

Series consultants: Lisa Kirkengen, Turid Wulff Knutsen, Christian Boe Astrup

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the publishers.

ISSN: 1503-1330
ISBN 10: 82-8158-028-3

NORDEM Report is available online at:
http://www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/publikasjonsliste.html
Preface

On invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the OSCE through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an international election observation mission in Skopje on 30 May for the 2006 parliamentary elections. Ambassador Audrey Glover from the United Kingdom was Head of Mission.

A team of 14 core staff members based in Skopje and 20 long-term observers (LTOs) deployed to the regions followed the pre-election campaign and the preparations for the elections. On election day about 380 international short-term observers (STOs) monitored the election on behalf of the OSCE/ODIHR, including a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and regionally based expatriates. This combined International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) visited over 1700 polling stations on election day.

Four Norwegian short-term observers (STOs) were recruited to the election observation mission through NORDEM Stand-by Force at the request of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Berit Bachen Dahle was deployed to Strumica, Kristin Dalen to Gostivar, Hilde Marit Knotten to Stip and Tom Røseth to Tetovo.

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights / NORDEM
University of Oslo
October 2006
## Contents

Preface

Contents

Map of Country

Introduction ............................................................................................................................1

Political background .........................................................................................................2

The Legislative Framework .............................................................................................5

The Electoral Administration ............................................................................................6

Voter and Civic Education ...............................................................................................6

Voter Registration .............................................................................................................7

Candidate Registration .....................................................................................................7

The Election Campaign ....................................................................................................7

The Media .........................................................................................................................8

Observation on Polling Day ............................................................................................9

  Observation of the opening .........................................................................................10

  Observation of the polling .........................................................................................10

  Observation of the closing and counting .................................................................11

  Observation of the tabulation ....................................................................................11

The Review of Complaints Process ................................................................................11

Conclusions and Recommendations .............................................................................12

Comments on the Election Observation Mission .........................................................12

Appendices ......................................................................................................................13

  IEOM Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions ..................................13

  Background .................................................................................................................15

  Election Administration .............................................................................................16

  Candidate Registration ..............................................................................................17

  Campaign Environment .............................................................................................18

  Participation of National Minorities and Women ....................................................19

  The Media ....................................................................................................................20

  Domestic Observers ....................................................................................................22

  Election Day and Vote Count ....................................................................................22

  Citizen’s Association MOST - Press Release ............................................................24
Map of Country
Introduction

According to the preliminary findings of the ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), the election process of the 2006 parliamentary election in the former Republic of Macedonia largely met the commitments of the OSCE and Council of Europe. There were, however, violent incidents and intimidation during the election campaign and on election day.

This was the ninth election in the country since the independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and both the electorate and the electoral officials are familiar with the election process. During this time, the technical election performance and the general atmosphere surrounding the elections have greatly improved.

The society in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is to a large extent ethnically segregated and this is reflected in the electorate. The electorate is mainly perceived as divided into two; one ethnic Macedonian (e/Macedonian) and one ethnic Albanian (e/Albanian). Thus, a party from one ethnicity does not compete with parties from the other ethnicity as the struggle for votes is fought within the respective ethnic group. Political infighting, including irregular methods and rough rhetoric, was especially frequent on the e/Albanian side in this election, and complaints were continuously made about incidents in the former crisis area in the northwest of the country. However, a significant number of irregularities were also noted in the e/Macedonian areas.

Prior to the election, the race for the majority of the parliamentary seats was expected to be a relative close race between the governmental parties and the opposition both on the e/Macedonian and the e/Albanian side. The election result showed that the governing e/Macedonian party coalition led by Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) lost, while the governing e/Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), remained the largest e/Albanian party. The ground was set for a possible new coalition between former adversaries, the more nationalistic e/Macedonian party The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the e/Albanian party DUI, which is generally perceived as the main political successor of the National Liberation Army (NLA). VMRO-DPMNE, however, chose the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) as their governing partner. The tradition of cooperating with the largest e/Albanian party was thus broken.

Despite the recent introduction of democratic government and the prospect of a close race in the present election, the electorates on both main ethnic sides already show tendencies of increased apathy. The disappointment at the high unemployment rates, slow economic development and lack of considerable political progress visible to “the man in the street” is evident. The voter turnout was only at about 56 percent, compared to 73 percent in the last parliamentary elections in 2002. The majority of the electorate also appears to have the impression that each time a new party or person comes to power, the party or person becomes corrupted. The electorate, especially on the e/Albanian side, might also be unrealistic in its expectations of an imminent political and economic improvement. Nevertheless, there is also an underlying optimism with regard to the prospect of integrating into the Euro-Atlantic structures.
Political background

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia1 peacefully achieved independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. This was much thanks to the former president Gligorov, who had good connections with Belgrade, and the fact that the Yugoslav army was occupied with war in its northern territories. The great majority of the population voted for independence in a referendum in September 1991. Most e/Albanians boycotted the referendum, however, as they opposed both alternatives; being a minority within Yugoslavia or within the then self-proclaimed Republic of Macedonia. The first years of the small republic were turbulent. The about 2 million inhabitants in the newly established state found themselves in a position where internal ethnic problems and challenging relations with the neighboring countries put the future existence of the state at risk.

The ethnic composition of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was a long disputed issue as the 1994 census was rejected by the e/Albanian minority. A new census with international observation and supervision in 2002 was widely respected by all ethnic groups. The ethnic composition given by the new census is as follows:

- Macedonians: 66.18%
- Albanians: 25.17%
- Turks: 3.85%
- Roma: 2.66%
- Bosniaks: 0.84%
- Serbs: 1.78%
- Vlachs: 0.48%
- Other: 1.04%

About 65 percent of the population belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church, while approximately 30 percent are Muslims. Religion largely follows ethnic lines as the e/Macedonians and Serbs generally are Orthodox and most e/Albanians and Turks are Muslims. Although religious lines generally overlap with ethnic lines and therefore constitute an additional identity factor in the country’s traditionally segregated society, the conflict in 2001 was not conceived as a religious conflict.

The political system in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a parliamentary system in which the majority forms the government. The formal head of the republic is the president, at present the former prime minister Branko Crvenkovski, who is elected by a direct popular vote. The government oversees the main functions of the state, while the president has limited powers. Since 1991 the Government has included the main e/Albanian party as a partner in government. This tradition has been considered a stabilizing factor during the turbulent years of internal ethnic tension.

After independence the new state struggled with its nation- and state building, being in a transitional phase from a communist regime with a centrally planned economy towards democratization and market liberalism. The challenging relationship with its neighbors and the lack of close supportive friends complicated the process. Although peacefully

----

1 In this report, the full name of the country will be used instead of the awkward acronym FYROM, which is in line with the policy of the ODIHR IEOM.
separated from Yugoslavia, the republic felt intimidated by Yugoslav military might and struggled with the “little brother syndrome”. The Kosovo war had a destabilizing spillover effect with the large number of refugees. In the east, many Bulgarians traditionally consider the e/Macedonians as “cousins” and that the Macedonian language is a mere dialect of the Bulgarian language. Albania on the other hand was not pleased with the treatment of the e/Albanian minority and the newly established state feared that Albania would support e/Albanian radicals and nationalists. Greece unilaterally boycotted the state from 1991 to 1994 due its name, and severely hampered economic development. Greece feared that the use of the name “Republic of Macedonia” would initiate an uprising in the Aegean Macedonia (in northern Greece) for a reunion of the ancient royal dynasty of the “Macedons”. After a compromise in 1994, the name “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” has been used temporarily until a better name is found. Just prior to the 2004 referendum, the USA made a strategic statement about a bilateral recognition of the republic’s constitutional name. The referendum had been initiated to oppose constitutional reform required by the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the agreement that stipulates the conditions of the peace process and minority rights. The statement of the USA was very positively received in Skopje and contributed greatly to a low turnout in the referendum.

Throughout the 1990s the reforms intended to improve minority rights progressed slowly and e/Macedonians were reluctant to give e/Albanians greater representation in state institutions. Although conditions were better than in neighboring Kosovo, the e/Albanians became increasingly frustrated by the lack of both influence and recognition as a significant national minority. The Kosovo War in 1999 had proved that armed insurgency might lead to international intervention and increased the Albanian confidence in that minority rights could be achieved.

The conflict started in February 2001 in Tanusevci northwest of Kumanovo and quickly moved westwards to the Tetovo area. The e/Albanian population in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is mainly concentrated along the northwestern border from Kumanovo in the north to Gostivar in the west. By June 2001 the conflict had spread to the whole area today called the “former crisis area,” which covers much of the e/Albanian area mentioned above. The National Liberation Army (NLA) was led by Ali Ahmeti, at present the leader of DUI, the main e/Albanian party that is a member in the outgoing government. In June the international community intervened and pressured the conflicting parties to declare a ceasefire in order to negotiate a peace agreement. Under international pressure all significant parties on both ethnic sides created a unity government in May 2001.

The peace agreement was concluded on 13 August 2001 and was called the “Ohrid Framework Agreement”. By this time over 100,000 persons had been internally displaced and about 100 people on each side had lost their lives. The peace agreement set the conditions for disarming the NLA, regaining state control of the former crisis area, and securing minority rights and proportional representation in relevant state structures.

As mentioned in the introduction, the political party landscape is divided along ethnic lines, although parties within one ethnic group can be placed in the traditional left to right spectrum. All ethnic groups are represented by at least one political party. 31 political parties and coalitions were registered for the 2006 parliamentary elections. The political sphere has become more fragmented since the previous parliamentary elections
in 2002, particularly on the e/Macedonian side. Until the elections, the government was composed of the “for Macedonia Together” coalition and the e/Albanian party DUI.

The main e/Macedonian parties

The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) is the main party in the coalition “For Macedonia Together”. Vlado Buckovski is the party president and replaced Branko Crvenkovski when he was elected president in April 2004. The party is social democratic in its orientation and is considered as the successor of the former communist party. The party was in governmental position from 1992 to 1998 and from 2002 to 2006. In October 2005, after a disagreement on the above mentioned 2004 referendum, a significant figure, Tito Petkovski, broke out and established his own party (see below). SDSM’s other main partner in the coalition, the Liberal Democratic Party, has struggled and also lost a main party figure on the same issue, Liljana Popovska, who founded the Democratic Reconstruction of Macedonia (DOM).

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) is the main opposition party on the e/Macedonian side and is politically more nationalistic and centre-right orientated. The party leader is Nikola Gruevski, who took over from Ljubo Georgievski when the latter resigned after a disappointing election in 2002. Due to strong disagreement with Gruevski’s policies, Georgievski formed a new party in 2004. VMRO-DPMNE was the main governmental party from 1998 to 2002 and has a joint list with 13 smaller parties. VMRO-DPMNE has criticized SDSM for its failure in both economic policies and integration in Euro-Atlantic structures.

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – People’s Party (VMRO-NP) was formed by Georgievski in 2005 as a protest to the Gruevski-led VMRO-DPMNE and is more nationalistic and rightwing. Georgievski was the prime minister from 1998 to 2002 and when he broke out of the VMRO-DPMNE he managed to retain control over most of the seats in the parliament. VMRO-NP did, however, not perform well in the 2005 municipal elections. The formal leader of the party is Vesna Janevska.

The New Social Democratic Party’s (NSDP) leader is Tito Petkovski, the former vice-president of the SDSM and speaker of parliament. The party is presented as an alternative to SDSM’s policies.

The main e/Albanian parties

The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) is the main successor of the NLA and the party leader Ali Ahmeti was also the leader of the NLA. Former commanders formed the party in 2002 prior to the parliamentary elections and DUI won most of the votes on the e/Albanian side. DUI also consolidated its position in the 2005 municipal elections versus the competing Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). The party’s policies are full implementation of the Ohrid Agreement and anti-corruption issues. DUI has been in government from 2002 to 2006.

Since DPA lost its position in government in 2002 the party moved towards a more nationalistic position with rhetoric that opposes the integration line stipulated by the Ohrid Agreement. The leader Arben Xhaferi argues that the implementation of the agreement has failed and that the integration process is a hopeless project. DPA lost significantly to the DUI in the municipal elections last year and chose to boycott the
second round. The DPA has on several occasions also boycotted parliament procedures, most recently in February this year, but without any apparent effect. The DPA was in government with VMRO-DPMNE in 1998-2002.

The Legislative Framework

The last parliamentary elections were held in 2002 and new elections were due to be held at the latest by October 2006 according to the constitutional four year rule. The parliamentary majority decided to hold elections on 5 July. The parliament has 120 seats and the representatives are elected by a regional proportional system with no threshold requirement. The Election Code divides the election districts into six and each district elects 20 representatives. With a turnout of about 60 percent, a candidate needs about 9000 votes to get a seat in parliament.

The relevant laws governing the parliamentary elections are the following:

- The Election Code, newly adopted
- The Law on Broadcasting, newly adopted
- The Law on Political Parties from 2004
- The Law on Civil Servants, newly amended
- The Criminal Code, newly amended

The last update of the Election Code is quite recent (March 2006) and several changes were made to improve the electoral framework. In previous elections serious violations in the Election Code had been difficult to prosecute. This was remedied by a change in the Criminal Code, which gave stricter sanctions for election-related offences. Three persons were also convicted in the spring of 2006 for serious irregularities during the elections in 2002 or 2005, and the authorities hoped for a preventive effect.

The State Election Committee (SEC), which was appointed on 14 April, made many changes to the election procedures, although there were disagreements between the chairman (from VMRO-DPMNE) and the other party representatives in the committee. One significant change was that all election board (EB) presidents were required to be state or municipal officials, a change that turned out to be difficult to implement in practice, according to the IEOM. The opposition in parliament (mostly VMRO-DPMNE) wanted more party representatives in the EBs, while the governmental parties wanted state officials. A compromise was made in March 2006 limiting the number of party representatives to two, one appointed by the main government party and one by the main opposition party in the respective area. This in effect kept the VMRO-NP representatives of the former prime minister Ljupco Georgievski out of the EBs. Changes were also made in the laws governing the activities of the police, the rights and obligations of observers and the training of election officials.

The IEOM stated that further work on the Election Code is needed. There is insufficient clarity on what constitutes “campaign activities” versus regular party activities. For example, the SDSM leadership in government have long talked about elections and after the breakout of Tito Petkovski in October 2005 they made several visits to local party
offices in an effort to keep the party together, which some alleged in effect amounted to campaign activities. There are also weak safeguards to prevent illegal campaign financing as, among other issues, anonymous donations still are allowed. Generally, states the IEOM, “there is a lack of effective implementation and control mechanisms for ensuring compliance with the regulations.” Many of the earlier recommendations are followed up legally, but the actual implementation and political will to change election procedures is questionable. According to IEOM there has also been a lack of will to prosecute and punish former election related criminal acts.

The Electoral Administration

According to the Election Code, there are three levels of electoral administration, the SEC, the 84 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and 2976 EBs. The SEC leader (from VMRO-DPMNE) is selected from the opposition parties in parliament, while the deputy (from DUI) represents the governmental parties. The other five members are selected from the remaining major parties.

The MEC and EB members are composed of a president, four members and their deputies. These were for the first time selected randomly. The MEC president and deputy were selected among members of the state- and municipal administrations, while the other members were selected among public administration officials. Two members are still politically appointed – one by the opposition parties and one by the governing parties – but this is only a transitional provision. In practice, this meant that about 3000 election officials had to serve on a MEC/EB away from their home precincts. These officials had to go home during election day in order to vote.

The MECs and EBs had mandatory training organized by the SEC, but it was delayed and the explanations of procedures were not always consistent, according to the IEOM. Also, the official SEC manual did not reach members of the EBs in due time.

Voter and Civic Education

The SEC performed a voter education program that included the production of radio and TV spots, as well as other voter information in the print media. Information about the voting procedures was also posted outside the EBs, as instructed by the Electoral Code. After eight elections since independence in 1991, the electorate has generally obtained a good understanding of election procedures.
Voter Registration

Prior to the election the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) made several steps to improve the voter list (VL). Voters are listed according to the municipality where he/she resides. The VL was displayed for public inspection in May both in regional offices and on the Internet. Approximately 6000 deceased persons were removed from the list. As in earlier elections, the VL has been subject to much criticism, but few substantial complaints were made within the deadline.

Much of the population in some areas live abroad and there was a fear that this situation could be abused for proxy voting. To minimize the risk the MoJ marked an asterisk (*) next to the names of the near 60,000 persons known to the authorities to reside abroad for more than a year. This was done to give the EBs an indication of who they should pay particular attention to with regard to possible proxy voting.

Candidate Registration

By 2 June, 31 political entities had submitted candidate lists for one or more of the six election districts. Registered political entities nominate candidates by submitting a list of candidates to the SEC. The SEC confirms and publishes the official list for each of the six election districts. All lists were approved by the SEC in a transparent manner according to the IEOM. Eleven parties and coalitions contested the election in all six districts.

According to MOST the participation of women has increased both as participants and as voters compared to the previous parliamentary election in 2002. The participation of women is still low, and few female political figures are present in the party campaigns. The present number of women on the party lists (23 out of 120 seats) might turn out to be even lower when converted to members of parliaments, as some may be asked to step down for the next male person on the list.

The Election Campaign

The election campaign commences 20 days prior to the election day and ends 24 hours prior to election day. All media are obliged to provide equal opportunities for the parties to present their electoral program. Although the campaign officially began on 15 June, it was generally perceived to have started long before that date. The parties mutually accused each other of early campaigning, but the SEC found the matter to be outside of its competence.

Much focus was given to the violent incidents in June during the first half of the campaign. Several serious incidents were reported especially in the e/Albanian dominated areas in the northwest of the country, known as the former crisis area.
Allegations were made between DUI and DPA as party activists and offices were attacked in Saraj, Tearce, Tetovo and other places.

This escalation of incidents led to a strong reaction from the international community (IC) in Skopje and some high level Albanian political leaders. It was made clear that election related violence could not only discredit the country’s process in relation to European integration, but also the Albanian cause.

There were also several incidents on the ethnic Macedonian side, with the fight between SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE activists in Skopje on the 21-22 June being the most noteworthy.

The last week before the election the situation calmed down and no serious incidents were reported.

Several complaints were made about the use of administrative resources at the municipal level for political campaigning. Municipal premises were used for meetings and other resources such as cars and phones were reportedly also used for campaigning.

During the campaign the e/Albanian opposition party DPA accused DUI of not working seriously on the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, that is, to improve the rights and representation of the Albanian minority. DUI, on the other hand, tried to stress what had actually been achieved during its four years in government. Among the main e/Macedonian parties the campaign focused on economic and social issues along with the prospect of Euro-Atlantic integration. There were incidents of negative campaigning, especially by the opposition both on the e/Albanian and e/Macedonian side.

The Norwegian observers partly observed rallies in Skopje on 2 July by the SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, VMRO-NP and DPA prior to election day. All of these party rallies were carried out in a relaxed atmosphere and no irregularities or clashes with other party activists were noted.

One of the Norwegian observers also observed the DUI rally on the main square in Tetovo on 3 July. There was a high risk that DPA and DUI activist would confront each other because the DPA conducted a rally at the stadium in Tetovo at the same time. To prevent incidents the head of the Tetovo police had a meeting with the DUI/DPA leaders where the IC was present. The well planned phasing of party supporters in different directions after the rallies was successful and no serious incidents were reported.

According to the NGO MOST the Ministry of Interior acted in accordance with its legal competences and contributed significantly to maintaining peace and securing the conduct of a fair and democratic process.

The Media

There is a large number of local newspapers, radio-stations and TV-stations in the country. Like the political parties, the media is mainly divided into two groups, one operating in Albanian and one in Macedonian. The state broadcaster MTV has two channels, one in Macedonian and one in Albanian. As a general rule, the two main ethnicities follow only the news coverage in their language, although many e/Albanians also follow media in the Macedonian language.
Election related broadcasting is regulated by the Election Code, the Rules for Equitable Media Presentation and the Law on Broadcasting Activities.

According to the IEOM, the media provided daily information on election issues and political activities during the 20-day campaign period. OSCE/ODIHR found that there was a reasonable degree of differentiation among media outlets. However, national broadcasters and newspapers used much space on Government activities. More time was also given to the campaign of the governmental coalition (23 percent of the airtime vs. 17 percent for the VMRO-DPMNE coalition). Albanian language MTV2 gave DUI two times more coverage than DPA (39 percent and 15 percent respectively).

According to the results of the OSCE/ODIHR’s media monitoring, the private television channels A1 TV and Kanal 5 were fairly balanced in their news coverage, while TV Sitel favored the opposition.

Both public and private TV channels failed to comply with the difficult legal requirement that national broadcasters cover contestants proportionally to the number of districts in which they are running. Still, the IEOM concluded that the overall coverage in the print and broadcasting media was moderate.

Observation on Polling Day

Countrywide, the elections were generally held in a peaceful and orderly manner, with the exception of some isolated incidents. The voter turnout was fairly low (about 56 percent). Voters could vote without queuing for a long time and no extension of opening hours was necessary.

During election day, the performance of the EB personnel was assessed as positive in a great majority of polling stations, and 95 percent of the opening procedures on the polling stations visited were assessed as positive, according to IEOM. Of the more than 1700 polling stations visited, family voting was observed in 20 percent of the polling stations. More irregularities in the performance of the EB occurred during the counting. In a significant number of cases the number of signatures in the VL were not counted (16 percent) and the VL was not compared with the number of unused ballots (19 percent). In 29 percent of the polling stations the ballot boxes were opened before the reconciliation process was completed. Tension and unrest were reported in 5 percent of the counts.

Domestic NGO observers were present in the great majority of polling stations; these generally represented the Citizen’s Association MOST. Some STO teams experienced that the MOST observers were not willing to share information about the activities in the polling stations. It is possible that they felt uncomfortable providing such information inside the polling station. Authorized party representatives were present in virtually all polling stations.
Short description of the respective areas of responsibility (AoRs) of the Norwegian STOs

*Berit Bachen Dahle* was deployed to Novo Selo in Strumica municipality in the southeastern part of the country. The Novo Selo area is rural and 99 percent of the population is e/Macedonian. The STO team observed ten polling stations.

*Kristin Dalen* was assigned to the Mavrovo Rosticha in Gostivar municipality in the far west of the country. The area is rural, mountainous and the small villages are difficult to access. The area is mainly populated by e/Macedonians, with an e/Albanian and Turk minority. The STO team monitored five polling stations.

*Hilde Marit Knotten* observed in the area between Stip and Kocani in the Cesinovo-Oblesevo municipality in the east of the country. The assigned area is only populated by e/Macedonians. The STO team visited eleven polling stations.

*Tom Røseth* was deployed to the south-centre of Tetovo city in the northwest of the country. Tetovo is a predominately e/Albanian city with an e/Macedonian minority. The STO team observed eleven polling stations.

Observation of the opening

All the polling stations the Norwegian STO teams observed opened at about 07:00 and no significant problems were reported. The EBs carried out the opening procedures well, all election material was present and election information was posted as described by the Election Code.

Observation of the polling

The vote was generally conducted in a peaceful and calm atmosphere in the polling stations visited by the STO teams. The EBs seemed overall very competent and the voting procedures were as a rule followed: Voters were checked for ink, IDs were controlled and the voter list was signed. Voters were then provided with a ballot stamped on the front page and ink was sprayed on the voter’s right thumb. After that the voting was conducted in the booth, the ballot stamped on the back side and put in the ballot box. Usually the ID was then returned to the voters before they left the polling station.

No cases of deliberate fraud or obvious intentional irregularities made by the EBs were observed, although several alleged “trouble spots” were assigned to the Norwegian STO teams. The police appeared to perform their task professionally, and no intimidation of voters or EBs was observed by the STO teams.

Some irregularities and shortcomings were nevertheless observed. The most serious cases monitored were the frequent incidents of family voting, although these were sometimes prevented by the EB officials. Three out of four STO teams observed several cases of family voting in the polling stations visited. This occurred both in e/Albanian and e/Macedonian areas, usually with elderly people. At times it was difficult to distinguish between assisted voting and family voting. One team pointed out that it was difficult to control the validity of the claim that the person being assisted really was illiterate or handicapped. But no systematic “assistance” by the same person was observed.

Another general problem was the number of relative small polling stations, which made it difficult to place the polling booth and ballot box in such a way as to facilitate a streamlined voting process. The polling booths were often placed by the door and when
a queue was building up this set up in some cases threatened to compromise the secrecy of the vote. In Tetovo, a polling station was so small that it was impossible to observe the vote without hindering the voting process. In Cesinovo-Oblesevo, election material was observed in the near vicinity of two polling stations.

In several instances allegations of fraud or serious irregularities were reported in the STOs’ AoR, but it was impossible for the teams to confirm such allegations. Generally, many allegations and counter allegations were made during election day, but they were often without real substance. This could be due to rumors or to a general suspicion of fraud related to elections, but also to possible diversions intended to obstruct the work of the IEOM.

The new rule requiring the EB presidents to be state- or municipal officials seemed to work fairly well, and in some cases seemed to improve the professionalism of the board. In the rural areas, however, this attendance by outsiders was deemed unnecessary by some EB members.

**Observation of the closing and counting**

The closing and counting was observed by all STO teams and no significant problems or ill intentioned practices were reported. The polling stations closed at 19:00 without exception and the procedure for counting was followed. Each ballot was clearly shown and stamps checked, then ballots were put in stacks according to party. The result of the counting was correct; the number of ballots used, the ballots left and the number of signatures in the voter list corresponded. Some minor mistakes were made, among them missing data in the handover form to the MEC. Two of the polling stations observed did not write the number of the seals securing the ballot boxes in the form.

**Observation of the tabulation**

All teams followed the EBs and ballot boxes to the local MEC. The presidents of the EBs handed over the material to the MEC within the time limit. The MEC accepted the material and signed the handover form. One of the STO teams observed that the MEC ordered the EB president to fill in missing data in the handover form. None of the STO teams were assigned to monitor the MEC, as the LTOs reserved this task for designated MEC teams. The full tabulation at the MEC was thus not followed by the Norwegian STO teams.

**The Review of Complaints Process**

The new Election Code states that candidates may initiate a procedure regarding violations of their rights to the first instance courts, whose decision can be appealed to Appellate Courts. According to the IEOM, almost half of the first instance courts they contacted were not aware of their new obligation to resolve certain election complaints. Another alternative is to complain to the SEC, and possibly appeal a SEC decision to the Supreme Court.
Conclusions and Recommendations

In its “Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions” the IEOM concludes that the election in most of the country was conducted in an orderly manner and in a generally peaceful atmosphere. Instances of violence and intimidation during the first half of the campaign and on election day “cast a shadow over an otherwise generally well-administered election held in a competitive environment”.2

The election administration at all levels, the SEC, MECs and EBs, performed generally very well, despite inconsistent training and delayed distribution of the instruction manual to the EBs, something that should be improved for the next election. The performance of the EBs during election day was to a great degree assessed as good, but the situation deteriorated somewhat during the count, which is a more complicated process.

The 2006 parliamentary election involved similar incidents as previous elections in the country. This includes low-intensity election related violence, somewhat biased state media and misuse of administrative resources. In comparison, there were fewer cases of ballot stuffing, but more registered cases of family voting and proxy voting. The new Election Code provided a more consistent basis in order to conduct the elections, although legal safeguards to prevent illegal campaign financing are inadequate.

Comments on the Election Observation Mission

The IEOM performed very well in the 2006 parliamentary elections and the mission was well organized. The information package provided prior to the deployment and the briefing pack received in Skopje were quite useful. Information provided by the LTOs was also relevant and well prepared. One complaint made by several observers was the difficulty of faxing observation forms from the field to Skopje during election day. There were too few phone lines and STO teams sometimes had to wait for a long time to send the forms to the IEOM core staff.

２IEOM Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Skopje, 6 July 2006.
STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS – CORRECTED VERSION

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

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

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

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

While election day took place in a generally calm environment and was conducted in an orderly manner in most of the country and the performance of Election Boards (EBs) was assessed positively in the large majority of polling stations, serious irregularities which undermined the universality and equality of the vote were reported from a number of municipalities, in particular Bogovinje, Brvenica, Gostivar, Struga, Studeničani, Tearce, Zajas and Zelino. They included isolated cases of ballot-box stuffing, vote buying, and instances of tension and intimidation. Group and proxy voting were

---

3 In a previous version of the statement, “isolated cases of serious irregularities” was omitted due to a technical error.
widespread. Voting procedures were not always followed, including important safeguards against multiple voting. The situation deteriorated during the vote count, which was assessed negatively in 15 per cent of counts observed; i.e. one in seven cases. While there were no deliberate attempts to tamper with the result protocols, serious irregularities were noted in 7 per cent of counts observed, and major procedural problems in 12 per cent.

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

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

At the same time, the following shortcomings were observed:

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

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

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Various interlocutors voiced their concerns that political parties may not have respected legal provisions regarding campaign financing, especially the limits on campaign spending and the use of prohibited donations. Legal safeguards to prevent illegal financing remain weak; for example, anonymous donations are allowed. Moreover, while political parties are required to submit financial reports on campaign financing after the elections, they do not need to include details of expenditures, only the total amount of funds spent. Thus, the competent institutions have limited possibilities to carry out a detailed audit of the reported expenditures. In particular, there is a lack of effective implementation and control mechanisms for ensuring compliance with the regulations.

**Election Administration**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Voter Lists

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

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

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

Candidate Registration

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

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

Campaign Environment

Politics is primarily divided along ethnic lines, and the key races were among ethnically-based parties competing for votes within their own community. Politics has become more fragmented since 2002, particularly on the ethnic-Macedonian side, with a number of new parties challenging the two main rivals within the ethnic-Macedonian community, “For Macedonia Together” and VMRO-DPMNE. They include VMRO, People’s Party (VMRO-NP), which broke away from VMRO-DPMNE in late 2004, the New Social Democratic Party (NSDP), formed in October 2005 by former senior SDSM official Tito PETkovski, and the Democratic Reconstruction of Macedonia (DOM), formed in January 2006 by Liljana Popovska, formerly a senior official of the SDSM’s junior coalition partner, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The main ethnic-Albanian parties in the outgoing parliament, the DUI and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), were the principal contenders in these elections as well. The DUI fought the election in a coalition with two smaller parties, one of which represents the Bosniak minority.

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

Although leaders of most political parties contesting the elections participated in the public signing of a Code of Conduct for fair elections on 13 June, the first half of the campaign was overshadowed by numerous violent incidents, allegations and counter-allegations. Most of these incidents occurred in the north-west of the country, and involved the DPA and the DUI. These included numerous attacks on party activists and campaign offices, notably in Saraj and Tearce. Other attacks occurred in the municipalities of Lipkovo, Studeničani, Tetovo, and Struga. A shooting incident in Saraj on the night of 18.19 June involved DPA and DUI activists; nobody was hurt during the shooting. At a further incident between DPA and DUI activists in Rače village (Saraj municipality) on 24 June, some of the persons involved were beaten, and one was injured by gunfire.

On the night of 21.22 June, there was a fight in central Skopje between SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE activists, arising out of a dispute over the placing of billboard posters. The incident, which the parties blamed on each other, according to some reports involved shooting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Participation of National Minorities and Women**

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

The Election Code stipulates that in municipalities where at least 20 per cent of the population are members of other ethnic communities, the composition of MECs and EBs must be based on the principle of adequate and equitable representation, and use of minority languages is mandatory in election administration bodies. This requirement extends to ballots and all official forms and documents.
The OSCE/ODIHR EOM received numerous reports of electoral malpractices affecting minority communities, including attempts to buy votes in return for small sums of money, food or settlement of minor debts; threats of loss of social benefits or other public services; as well as more severe pressure and intimidation in some localities. The OSCE/ODIHR observed that in tip, Roma ID cards left as a guarantee of credit at local stores were no longer there on election day. One local party leader told the EOM that his party would give shop owners some 500 Euro to cover the debts of their members.

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

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

The Media

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

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

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

The OSCE/ODIHR EOM conducted an analysis of the main broadcast and print media, both prior to the commencement of the official campaign period (2-14 June) and from 15 June to election day4. Monitoring findings indicate that in the period before the official start of the campaign, national broadcasters and newspapers covered Government activities at length.

4 OSCE/ODIHR EOM media monitoring activities focused on the prime time broadcasts of the first channel of public Macedonian Radio Television, MTV1, and of the three private stations, A1 TV, TV Sitel and Kanal 5, as well as on the most important daily newspapers in the Macedonian and Albanian languages. In addition, the main news and debates in Albanian language on public MTV2 and the free-of-charge presentations and debates on MTV+ were analyzed.
During the official campaign period, on MTV1 evening newscasts the ruling coalition Together for Macedonia received 23 per cent of airtime devoted to political subjects, while the VMRO-DPMNE coalition received 17 per cent of the political time. News coverage of the government representatives acting in their official capacity was on the two monitored public TV stations significantly more when compared with the private channels (12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively on MTV1 and MTV2 compared with an average of 3.6 per cent on the three private channels monitored).

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

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

Private and public TV channels failed in their overall programming to comply with the legal requirement that national broadcasters cover contestants proportionally to the number of districts in which they are running. This provision proved to be problematic to implement for the broadcasters, mainly because of the different intensity of campaign activities organized by the various list submitters.

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

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

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

**Complaints and Appeals**

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

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

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

Election Day and Vote Count

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

IEOM observers visited over 1,700 polling stations across the country. Opening procedures were assessed positively in 95 per cent of polling stations visited. Problems noted included minutes not being completed before the polling station was opened (15 per cent), serial numbers of ballot box seals not being recorded (8 per cent), and party representatives and observers not being shown that the ballot box was empty (15 per cent). In a few cases, important election materials were missing.

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

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

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

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

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

Key procedures were not followed and safeguards against irregularities were not implemented. This included not counting the number of signatures on the VL (16 per cent) and not reconciling the VL with the number of unused ballots (19 per cent). In 29 per cent of observed cases, the reconciliation procedures were not completed before the ballot boxes were opened and in 9 per cent of observations the reconciliation figures were not recorded in the results protocol. The serial numbers of the ballot box seals were not checked in 19 per cent of observed cases. The determination of valid and invalid ballots was assessed as inconsistent in 8 per cent of observed counts, and in 24 per cent there was disagreement about ballot validity among EB members. When validity was determined by voting, the EB failed to write this on the back of the ballot in 74 per cent of counts. In 4 per cent, ballots were not divided in stacks by contestants, and in 4 per cent figures were not counted accurately. Tension and unrest were reported from 5 per cent of counts, while unauthorized persons were present during 4 per cent.

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

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

This statement is also available in Macedonian and Albanian.

However, the English version remains the only official document.

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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

For further information, please contact:

• Urdur Gunnarsdottir, OSCE/ODIHR Spokesperson (+48.603.683 122); or Holly Ruthrauff, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser, in Warsaw (+48.603.793 783);
• Bas Klein, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg (+33.662265489).

Citizen’s Association MOST - Press Release

Parliamentary elections 2006, Preliminary Press release
06.07.2006

On the basis of the reports received by the monitors, deployed on 70% of the polling units across the Republic of Macedonia, as well as by the regional coordinators, the Citizen’s Association MOST, evaluated the day of the Parliamentary elections 2006 as stable but with similar incidents that were typical for the previous elections cycles, such as filling the boxes which this time is with lower intensity in comparison, at the expense of proxy and group voting whose number increased. Problems regarding the conducting of the counting of votes were also registered.

The preliminary evaluation of MOST is that the day of the Parliamentary elections was in a peaceful atmosphere, without more serious incidents, but with violation of the voting procedure and increased intensity of family voting.

Regarding the conducting of the voting procedure by the Election boards, there were certain cases of insufficient training, i.e. imprecision in the conducting of the procedure that made the collecting and the tabulation of the election material harder. However if we take into consideration the real situation, most of the election administration responsibly did its function.

The Citizen’s Association MOST in the election process stated that the participation of women has increased both as participants and as voters in these Parliamentary elections, which was not the case in the previous elections cycles.

More that half of the registered number of voters in the voter’s list and accomplished their right to vote.

The Ministry of Interior on E-day acted in accordance with their legal competences and gave significant contribution for keeping the peace and conducting of fair and democratic process.