



## **INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**

***The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Presidential Elections 31 October 1999***



### **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

**Skopje, 1 November 1999** - This preliminary statement of the International Election Observation Mission for the 31 October 1999 Presidential Election in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is issued jointly by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

This statement is preliminary and does not take account of the complete electoral process, which is ongoing. The OSCE/ODIHR will issue a final report after the completion of the whole electoral process. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly will also prepare a full report in due course.

---

#### **Summary of Conclusions**

- **The first round of the 1999 elections for the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia represents a further clear improvement on past elections, building on many of the positive aspects of the 1998 elections.**
- **The observation mission noted some concerns regarding the political campaign, but in general found that it was well conducted with only minor incidents reported.**
- **Media coverage represents an improvement on the 1998 election, with most media meeting their responsibilities to treat all candidates equally. The electronic media generally provided a full and comprehensive coverage of the campaign for the public. The time allocated to candidates was generally equal, but some bias in the quality of coverage was noted. Most print media correctly limited comments to the editorial pages, but some did exhibit a bias in their reporting.**
- **The election law enjoys wide political consensus. However, the legislative framework could be further strengthened if clarifications are made, particularly regarding the nomination of election commissions and the media coverage of the campaign.**
- **The State Election Commission is to be commended for issuing a number of administrative instructions aimed at increasing confidence in the voting and counting processes. On the day of the election, the observation mission noted that these served to strengthen the process.**
- **On election day observation reports from across the country noted that the process was generally carried out according to the law. Irregularities were noted in some polling stations, and these should be addressed for the second round. It was also noted that a limited number of Polling Election Boards were not formed on a full multi-party basis.**
- **In conclusion, the International Election Observation Mission found that the overall process was well conducted. A number of problems were noted and need to be addressed for the second round. The observation mission stresses that it is vital for all aspects of the second round to be properly conducted and for any shortcomings in the formation of election boards to be addressed in good time for the second round of voting. Based on the overall findings of the International Election Observation Mission, the 1999 Presidential Elections appear to have been carried out in general accordance with OSCE Commitments and Council of Europe standards.**

---

#### **The Electoral Framework**

The legal framework for the election enjoys broad political consensus, which contributes to a solid legislative base for the elections. However, the relevant legal texts for the election contain some ambiguities that should be clarified in order to further strengthen the electoral legislation.



## **INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**

### ***The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Presidential Elections 31 October 1999***



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

The spirit of the existing law in seeking to provide multi-party representation is to be commended. However, it does not take into account parties leaving or joining the government at a late stage, the formation of pre-election coalitions, the formation of new parties or the possibility for all “ruling parties” to be competing against each other. It would be more relevant if the possibility for party representation on election commissions at all levels was simply offered to the parties or candidates competing in the election.

The number of voters in the final voter register increased by over 37,000 compared to 1998. The breakdown of the national level figures given by the Ministry of Justice appears to be reasonable. It is unfortunate, however, that the breakdown was not more quickly made available by the Ministry of Justice, as it led to days of speculation in the media, which could have been harmful for the integrity of the process. The Observation Mission checked the polling station in District 72, which had been identified as a concern by a political party. The Observation Mission was informed that the additional voters were new registrants from overseas submitted by the Ministry of Interior, and did not vote on election day.

### **The Election Environment and Media Coverage**

The campaign was characterised by a significant number of rallies and events throughout the country and a comprehensive coverage by the media. As a result, it is clear that voters had access to a substantial amount of information from which to base their choice.

The vast majority of rallies were peaceful and passed without incident. Only at a couple of rallies were problems reported, and these were minor and localised in character. There were a few reported incidents of violence against local party offices. All political parties need to ensure that their activists behave responsibly during the campaign.

There were reports that the ruling parties were utilising state resources in the course of their campaign, for example to put up large banners in the city of Skopje. The use of state resources, to any degree, for the benefit of any one party in the election campaign is not permissible.

A number of parties and citizens expressed concern to the observation mission that some directors of state and private companies were using their positions to try to influence their employees' choice of candidate. These claims were widespread, but it has been difficult for the observation mission to verify them. It is important to highlight this concern and to stress that, if such a practice occurred, it represents intimidation and should be addressed by the state authorities.

The articles of the law addressing media coverage of the election campaign are limited to a basic assertion that all candidates should be treated equally, but with no precise stipulation for how this should be achieved. The articles are supplemented by a number of rules and guidelines from the Broadcasting Council, which whilst being helpful, lack legal jurisdiction, and cover only the electronic media with no guidance for print media. Each media sets its own guidelines for the campaign coverage. The result has been a lack of consistency in policy for media coverage of the campaign, and a difficulty in enforcing legal requirements.

The overall coverage of the campaign in the electronic and print media represents an improvement upon last year, both in terms of quantity and quality of coverage. The extensive coverage offered to the public served to increase their access to information on candidates.

The quantitative analysis of the electronic media shows that the time allocated in the electoral programming was fairly distributed, and analysis shows that the TV channels monitored (TV Era, A1, Sitel, Channel 5, Telma, MRTV 1, MRTV 2) generally met their responsibilities.

MRTV, the public service broadcaster, was the only channel to cover the campaign in the regions, and it is to be commended for its extensive coverage. However, a candidate from a ruling party (VMRO-DPMNE) was given a higher quality of coverage on MRTV, with better time slots and rally coverage. Further, its news coverage gave extensive time to members of the government. The overall effect of these factors was an over representation on MRTV of the VMRO-DPMNE candidate and party during the campaign. All electronic media have an obligation to provide equal coverage of candidates, but MRTV, as a public service broadcaster, bears a special responsibility for neutrality and equality in its coverage.



## INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

### The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Presidential Elections 31 October 1999



## PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

MRTV did not hold candidates responsible for party debts from 1998. This gave all candidates an equal chance to have paid advertisements on the public service channels if they chose. It is regrettable that *Nova Makedonija*, which has a majority of public funding, came to a different policy decision on the same issue, resulting in a political imbalance of advertising possibilities in one of the national newspapers.

In the print media monitored (*Nova Makedonija*, *Dnevnik*, *Utrinski Vesnik*, *Flaka*, *Fakti*), with some exceptions comments on the campaign were largely limited to editorial pages, with generally neutral reporting on the campaign rallies. However, it was noticeable that as the campaign moved closer to the day of election, a few newspapers allowed comments to filter into rally reports, highlighting their support for certain candidates. For example, the Friday 29 October edition of *Flaka* (a majority state-owned company), openly promoted the DPA candidate, whilst *Nova Makedonija* showed clear support for the VMRO-DPMNE candidate.

### Election Day

Prior to the election, the State Election Commission issued a number of positive administrative instructions aimed at improving the quality of the electoral process, such as mixing the numbered ballots, improving the quality of the ballot paper and allowing a ballot to be counted so long as the voter's preference was clear. On election day, the Observation Mission was pleased to note that these instructions were adhered to.

The general findings of observers from across the country was of an orderly voting and counting process, with polling board members carrying out their duties according to the law. However, a number of incidents were reported. The observation mission will continue to monitor reports and any claims at the District level.

There were reports of problems in some polling stations in District 66. This is highly unfortunate as similar problems were also experienced last year and should have been prevented this year. The electoral authorities must address these problems and ensure that the people in charge of District Election Commissions (DEC) and PEBs are capable of implementing the election according to the law. The observation mission will continue to monitor reports and claims over the next few days.

It appears that some PEBs only contained representatives from two political parties, rather than the stipulated four. This is highly irregular and serves to increase tension in the polling station. For the second round, DEC's must ensure PEBs are truly multi-party to safeguard the transparency of the process. Political parties must fully meet their responsibility to have nominated representatives on the PEBs.

There were also reports of proxy voting and family voting in some areas. These practices should not be allowed by PEBs, as they are illegal and serve to disenfranchise some voters, particularly women.

---

### Mission Information

*This assessment is based upon the reports of 13 long-term experts from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and some 155 short-term observers from 27 participating States. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also participated in the observation, with an 8-member delegation. On election day, observers reported from over 900 polling stations in 81 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 OSCE/ODIHR Observation Mission. Mr. Henning Gjellerod, Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly and member of the Danish Parliament, is Head of the Council of Europe parliamentary delegation.*

### Contacts:

Mark Stevens  
OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation  
Mission  
Tel/Fax. 091 231 671  
Mobile: 070 255 582

Anders Karlsen  
ODIHR  
Tel. +48 22 520 0600  
Fax: +48 22 628 6967

Stefano Bertozzi  
Council of Europe Parliamentary  
Assembly  
Tel. +33 3 88 41 20 87  
Fax: +33 3 88 41 37 95