



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Republic of North Macedonia – Parliamentary Elections and Presidential Election Second Round, 8 May 2024

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The parliamentary and presidential elections were competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected, although the process remains insufficiently regulated. The election legislation provides a suitable framework for holding democratic elections, but persisting inconsistencies, gaps, and ambiguities compromised legal certainty and merit revision. The extensive and pluralistic campaign coverage in the media gave voters the opportunity to make an informed choice, but negative rhetoric, and nationalistic slogans marred an otherwise stable pre-election period. With the notable exception of one presidential candidate in the run-off, campaigns featured few women political figures overall. Transparency and accountability of campaign finances were weakened by the minimal finance reporting obligations, and the limited capacity of the oversight bodies, including for monitoring the misuse of administrative resources. Authorities, including the State Election Commission and the Constitutional Court, did not always adequately address election-related complaints in a timely, and transparent manner, limiting the effectiveness of legal remedies. The elections were organized effectively, but the frequent allegations of vote-buying in the run-up to the elections affected confidence in the process. In the polling stations observed, the voting process was orderly, transparent and assessed positively; however, in several instances, election boards did not fully adhere to the prescribed procedures during the vote count.

The parliamentary elections were held concurrently with the presidential second round. In the run-up to these elections, most IEOM interlocutors referred to a generalized atmosphere of disaffection with the political establishment, citing a lack of will by both the government and opposition to address long-standing calls for comprehensive reforms. Following the 24 April presidential election, the State Election Commission (SEC) announced that none of the seven candidates had obtained more than half the votes of all registered voters required to secure a first-round victory, and that a second round would be held between the incumbent Stevo Pendarovski, and the opposition candidate Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova.

The legal framework for the parliamentary and presidential elections establishes the basis for holding democratic elections; however, some provisions do not comply with international standards, and persisting inconsistencies, gaps and ambiguous formulations undermine legal certainty and merit further revision. Regrettably, the Electoral Code was recently amended through expedited processes lacking transparency and public consultation, which is not in line with international standards and OSCE commitments. Although the changes incorporated some previous ODIHR recommendations and technical proposals from the SEC, they largely disregarded recommendations of the inter-agency working group tasked with electoral reform. A number of key ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed, including those to systematically revise the Electoral Code, to ensure equal access to the media in election campaigns and to increase accountability and integrity of campaign financing.

The election administration met all legal deadlines and enjoyed public confidence in its technical capacity. During the pre-electoral period, the SEC held regular sessions that were open to the public and broadcast online, but it did not consistently provide public notice of its sessions, and sometimes announced them less than an hour in advance. The training for lower-level election bodies was observed to be generally comprehensive, and also incorporated lessons learned from the first-round presidential

election day. The outreach scope and topics covered by the SEC's voter education material remained limited, with video spots on some election-day procedures only introduced between the two election days.

The final voter register listed 1,815,350 voters for the parliamentary election and 1,814,317 voters for the presidential run-off. The law does not provide for the voter register to be updated between the two rounds of the presidential election. As a temporary measure to mitigate delays caused by the late issuance of new ID documents, voters with documents expired up to nine months before the elections were allowed to use them for identification on election day. IEOM interlocutors generally did not raise concerns about the inclusiveness of the voter register. This notwithstanding, persistent shortcomings in the residential address system and civil registration, which diminished data accuracy, were noted. Previous recommendations by ODIHR to update and audit these databases were not implemented.

In an inclusive process, the SEC registered 1,680 parliamentary candidates nominated by 12 political parties and 5 coalitions, and rejected nine candidate lists for failing to meet the legal registration criteria. The SEC complied with all legal provisions and deadlines in reviewing the nomination documents, but reported difficulties in meeting these deadlines in some instances, citing the delayed provision of personal and criminal record data by state authorities.

For the parliamentary race, the law mandates a minimum of 40 per cent representation of either gender on each candidate list. All registered candidate lists met the gender requirements. While women comprised 43 per cent of all parliamentary candidates, they were often placed in the lowest positions allowed by the law, and women candidates headed only 25 per cent of the lists. The political parties featured few women speakers at campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM, and parties appeared to make little effort to engage women voters. Issues related to gender equality were largely absent from campaign discourse. One of the two candidates in the presidential run-off was a woman.

The campaigns were competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected. Regulation of access to campaign spaces, the media, and the funding of political parties advantages the four main parliamentary political parties over other contestants. Key themes of the parliamentary and presidential run-off campaigns included the economy, anti-corruption efforts, European Union (EU) accession and constitutional reform. The tone of campaigning, including online, became progressively negative ahead of the first round of the presidential elections, and remained so in both parliamentary and presidential campaigns. Ethnic Albanian parties featured prominently in the campaign. However, representatives of some ethnic minority parties raised concerns that the distribution of state campaign funds according to a formula based on parties' representation in parliament hampered their ability to campaign on an equal footing.

The formula for distribution of state funds for campaigning disadvantaged smaller and non-parliamentary parties. Only 11 of the 17 parliamentary contestants submitted interim campaign finance reports in a timely manner and in the required format. Reporting requirements for interim reports excluded detailed information on contributions and did not require reporting on expenditures, reducing transparency and accountability. The minimal campaign finance reporting requirements, deficiencies and inconsistencies in the legal framework, as well as limited resources and capacities of the oversight bodies, including for monitoring and preventing the misuse of administrative resources, significantly diminished transparency and accountability.

The media environment is generally free. The ODIHR EOM media monitoring found that the public broadcaster covered the major parliamentary and presidential contestants in line with the formula for allocating time to political parties in elections, which privileges the largest parliamentary parties. Private media presented adequate information on all candidates overall, with some channels favouring specific candidate lists. There were several televised debates featuring contestants running for the major

coalitions in the parliamentary elections, as well as three debates between the two candidates in the presidential run-off, contributing to the ability of voters to make an informed choice. Most IEOM interlocutors emphasized the need for further reforms in the media sector to enhance the viability of outlets, regulate online media, and further align the legal framework with the EU *acquis*.

The legal framework does not sufficiently ensure access to legal redress; in practice, the SEC did not provide effective legal remedy for complaints submitted on the 24 April election day, leaving approximately half of these unresolved by the close of the polls. Further, the majority of its decisions on complaints available for ODIHR EOM review did not provide the reasoning, and many decisions referenced outdated legal acts and incorrect legal remedies for appeals. The Administrative Court complied with the short deadlines for deciding on appeals. The Constitutional Court did not review in a timely manner the two election-related petitions it had received, examining and rejecting one after the challenged provisions had already been implemented; while the second one remained undecided prior to the 8 May election day, which the Court attributed to the lack of expedited deadlines for constitutional review. Many IEOM interlocutors expressed minimal trust in the adjudication of election-related complaints, citing inefficiency of the judiciary and the election administration.

Election day was generally calm and peaceful. IEOM observers assessed voting procedures positively in the vast majority of the 1,340 polling stations observed, with procedural safeguards such as voter identification, stamping of ballot papers by EBs and signing of voter lists conducted in line with legal provisions at almost all polling stations. However, some instances of group and family voting were observed. In some cases, while not against the law, the tracking of voters was also noted. The legal requirement for EBs to inform voters about voting procedures, which is important to reduce the number of invalid ballots, was not followed in almost half of the polling stations. The counting process was assessed as negative in 16 of the 106 polling stations observed, primarily due to procedural errors and omissions in the counting procedures and important safeguards, in some cases impacting transparency. Tabulation was generally evaluated as efficient; however, limited space and overcrowding limited transparency in some cases and three out of four observations noted mistakes or discrepancies in polling station results protocols.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background and Political Context

On 14 February 2024, the speaker of the parliament announced that the regularly scheduled parliamentary elections would be held on 8 May, concurrently with the potential second round of the presidential election.¹ Following the presidential election held on 24 April, the SEC announced that none of the seven candidates had obtained the total of more than half the votes of all registered voters, which is required to secure a first-round victory, and a second round would be held between the incumbent Stevo Pendarovski, and the opposition candidate, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova.²

The last parliamentary elections were held on 15 July 2020, before the end of the sitting parliament's term, and resulted in the formation of a coalition government led by SDSM and the Besa Movement.³

¹ According to the Constitution, the presidential election must be conducted within the final 60 days of the incumbent president's term, while parliamentary elections must take place within the last 90 days of the parliament's term.

² If no candidate receives more than half the votes of all registered voters, a second round is held two weeks later between the two top candidates. In the second round, the candidate with the highest tally is elected, unless the turnout falls below 40 percent, in which case the entire election process is repeated without a legally determined deadline. Mr. Pendarovski, endorsed by the SDSM-led coalition, obtained 20.49 per cent of the valid votes, while Ms. Siljanovska-Davkova, endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, obtained 41.21 per cent.

³ SDSM and Besa jointly secured 46 seats, BDI/DUI won 15 seats, and the coalition between the Alliance for Albanians and AlternativA obtained 12 seats, while VMRO-DPMNE won 44 seats, *the Left* (Levica) gained 2 seats, and the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH/DPA) secured 1 seat.

The political landscape is dominated by two parties, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), which have led alternating governing coalitions since independence. In January 2024, in accordance with the law and the coalition agreement between the SDSM and the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI/DUI), a caretaker government led by Talat Xhaferi, the country’s first ethnic-Albanian prime minister, was established to organize the elections.⁴ This is the first time since 2006 that a parliament has completed its full term.

Prior to the parliamentary elections, the pre-electoral political environment remained calm. However, entrenched political fragmentation and ethnic divisions have hindered the passage of reforms related to election legislation, necessary reforms in public administration and the judiciary, as well as the implementation of anti-corruption efforts also required by the European Union (EU) for accession. Most IEOM interlocutors referred to a generalized atmosphere of disaffection with the political establishment, due to perceptions of political influence in institutional appointments, long-standing inefficiencies within the public administration, and high-profile corruption cases.⁵

The Constitution provides for equality of men and women, and the 2012 Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men requires equal gender representation at all levels of public administration and public life.⁶ The outgoing parliament included 51 women (42.5 per cent). Women hold 4 of the 20 ministerial positions (20 per cent). Only 2 of the 80 municipal mayors (2.5 per cent) are women. Of the 62 registered parties that participated in the parliamentary race independently or as part of coalitions, only 6 have women leaders (9.6 per cent). This underrepresentation in various elected and appointed positions, coupled with instances of pressure and online attacks on female politicians, indicates that efforts by the authorities and political parties to address the enduring gender stereotypes impeding women’s participation in politics have been insufficient.⁷ The Constitution guarantees the protection of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all communities. However, Roma and Turks are underrepresented in some aspects of public life.⁸

Electoral System and Legal Framework

The unicameral parliament, comprising 120 to 123 members (MPs), is directly elected for a four-year term, under a proportional representation system from closed lists. Of these, 20 MPs are elected from each of the 6 in-country districts. Up to three MPs can be elected from a single electoral district abroad. The number of seats open for election depends on a threshold calculated on the basis of the previous election results, with no correlation to voter turnout, which is not in line with the principle of equality

⁴ The Law on Government requires that a caretaker government consisting of ministers from the ruling majority and the largest opposition party take office 100 days before the holding of parliamentary elections.

⁵ See section 2.1.2 of the [North Macedonia 2023 Report](#) by the European Commission (EC), which states that, despite ongoing efforts, no legislation has been adopted to tackle “nepotism, cronyism and political influence in the recruitment of public sector employees and in the appointment of members of supervisory and management boards”. Section 2.2.1 further states that “Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and is an issue of concern. Delays and reversals in trials of high-level corruption cases increased [...] The maximum legal penalties for specific corruption-related criminal offences were reduced, [...] halting or even terminating, a large number of high-level corruption cases”.

⁶ A Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was originally adopted in 2006 and was substituted by the 2012 law with the same title.

⁷ Several women politicians, along with other interlocutors, reported to the IEOM that they had experienced instances of gender-based discrimination, unequal treatment in the political sphere, and targeted attacks online, directed at them because of their gender. The 2023 UN Women [Country Gender Equality Profile](#) states that “There are numerous barriers for women who aspire to leadership positions in politics, stemming from prevailing patriarchal values and prejudice, as well as socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes [...]. Political parties lack fundamental protections for their women members, activists, and political representatives.”

⁸ According to the 2021 [census](#), Macedonians comprise 58.44 per cent of the total resident population, followed by Albanians at 24.30 percent, Turks at 3.86 per cent, Roma at 2.53 per cent, Serbs at 1.30 per cent, Bosniaks at 0.87 per cent, and Vlachs at 0.47 per cent.

of the vote.⁹ The Electoral Code permits that the number of voters in a given in-country district deviate from the average number of voters per district by no more than five percent. The number of registered voters in three districts exceeds this threshold but boundaries were not adjusted ahead of the parliamentary elections, contrary to the law and international good practice.¹⁰

The elections are regulated by the 1991 Constitution, the 2006 Electoral Code, the 2004 Law on Financing of Political Parties, the 2019 Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflicts of Interest, the Criminal Code, and subsidiary acts by the State Election Commission (SEC).¹¹ The legal framework for the parliamentary and presidential elections establishes the basis for holding democratic elections.

Some rules on the parliamentary elections fall short of international standards and international good practice, including the voting rights of persons with disabilities, the disproportionate restrictions on candidacy rights based on criminal charges, and the requirements to disclose ethnic affiliation to register as a candidate. Other aspects of parliamentary elections remain underregulated.¹² Key aspects of the presidential election are also not regulated, including some campaign rules, access to the media and the distribution of state funding, undermining legal certainty. Certain SEC instructions adopted or reinstated for these elections interpret the law in a manner that is restrictively narrow.¹³

Many IEOM interlocutors raised concerns about a persistent lack of political will to address key problematic aspects of the electoral process in legal reforms and a repeated practice of amending the legal framework immediately ahead of elections. The Electoral Code was last amended on 7 March and 1 April 2024, after the elections had been announced, which undermines legal certainty.¹⁴ Contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards, the changes, which resulted from negotiations between the ruling parties and the opposition, were adopted through an expedited process, without public

⁹ A candidate is elected if the list receives at least the lowest number of votes won by an elected MP in-country in the previous elections. If no list in the out-of-country district obtains the required number of votes, no MP is elected. The threshold to elect an MP from the out-of-country district has never been met in any prior parliamentary elections. Paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) requires the States to “guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens”. See also Paragraph 20 of the 2016 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission and ODIHR [Joint Opinion on the Electoral Code](#), which recommends that “an alternative procedure be provided so that the right to vote of all eligible voters abroad, as provided by Electoral Code, is guaranteed in conformity with the principle of equality of the vote”.

¹⁰ Based on voter registration data, there was a 6.5 per cent surplus in electoral district No. 2, while electoral districts No. 3 and 4 experienced shortfalls of 9.1 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. The Electoral Code does not establish procedures or methodologies for determining and eliminating disparities among electoral districts, and changes to election district boundaries can only be made through a specific amendment to the Electoral Code. Previously, electoral district boundaries were amended selectively, upon alleged political lobbying (for example, in 2020 an ethnic-Albanian political party initiated the revision of boundaries in districts No. 5 and 6, while the boundaries of other electoral districts remained unchanged, despite existing disparities). See also I.2.2 vii. of the 2002 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) and paragraphs 6,7, 19-23 of the 2017 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission [Report on Constituency Delineation and Seat Allocation](#).

¹¹ The legal framework includes the 2004 Law on Political Parties, the 2013 Law on Media, and the 2013 Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services. North Macedonia has ratified key international and regional human rights instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.

¹² The rules on maintenance and modification of the voter register do not allow effective integration of data provided by various agencies, and the law does not define a methodology for the revision of election district boundaries. Underregulated aspects include candidate withdrawal after registration, and dispute resolution competencies among election management bodies. The legal standing of voters is limited to their individual rights, and the law maintains contradictory provisions on the compensation of campaign expenditures.

¹³ For example, contrary to the legal requirement to establish voters’ intentions in determining ballot validity, the SEC instruction mandates accepting only one symbol and ink colour to recognize a ballot’s validity. The SEC instructions on complaint resolution restrictively interpret the role of the MECs, and impose additional limits on complaint submission and the presentation of arguments by parties at SEC sessions.

¹⁴ Due to their late adoption, certain new provisions, such as the modified number of signatures required for nominating parliamentary candidates, were not implemented for these elections. See also paragraphs 58 and 60 of the 2016 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission [Rule of Law Checklist](#) that states that “the law must, where possible, be proclaimed in advance of implementation and be foreseeable as to its effects”.

debate.¹⁵ Although the changes incorporated some previous ODIHR recommendations and technical proposals from the SEC, they largely disregarded recommendations made by the inter-agency working group in November 2023, which had been driving electoral reform discussions since May of that year.¹⁶

Further, a number of previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed, including on the need for systematic revision of the Electoral Code to eliminate gaps and inconsistencies to provide legal certainty.¹⁷ Many IEOM interlocutors, including those from state institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs), criticized the lack of transparency in the adoption process and its failure to address long-standing shortcomings of the election-related legislation, and emphasized the necessity for comprehensive legal reform.

Election Administration

The elections were administered by a three-level administration comprising the SEC, 80 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs), and 3,391 Election Boards (EBs). Out-of-country voting was conducted in 31 diplomatic and consular offices in 22 countries.¹⁸ Early voting was administered on 7 May for homebound voters, those in penal institutions, and institutional care facilities.¹⁹

The SEC consists of seven members, nominated by political parties and appointed by the parliament for a five-year mandate.²⁰ During the pre-electoral period, the SEC held regular sessions that were open to the public and broadcast online, but it did not consistently provide public notice of its sessions, and sometimes announced them less than an hour in advance, including the session for the official announcement of preliminary results of the first round of the presidential election and post-election complaints. Moreover, not all session minutes and decisions were published online as legally required, which limited transparency. Many ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including some MEC members, noted that the SEC adopted some instructions and decisions late, and the guidance provided on key issues

¹⁵ The bill was submitted by three MPs from VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, and BDI/DUI. On 7 March, out of 86 MPs present, 84 approved the bill, including 30 of the 40 VMRO-DPMNE MPs, 28 of the 33 SDSM MPs, 11 of the 13 BDI/DUI MPs, and 5 of the 8 Alliance for Albanians MPs. In paragraph 5.8 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) participating States committed to adopt legislation “at the end of a public procedure”. Paragraph 8 of the 1996 UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) [General Comment no 25](#) to Article 25 of the 1966 ICCPR states that “Citizens also take part in the conduct of public affairs by exerting influence through public debate [...] with their representatives”. Paragraph 60 of the 2016 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission [Rule of Law Checklist](#) states that “[l]aw can be changed, but with public debate and notice, and without adversely affecting legitimate expectations”.

¹⁶ The amendments, *inter alia*, eliminate the requirement for citizens to possess a valid ID document in order to retain their inclusion in the voter register, revise certain campaign finance regulations, enhance data protection in relation to voter registration, specify deadlines for resolving election disputes and, for these elections, permit the use of certain expired identity documents for voter verification.

¹⁷ Other key ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations include on ensuring equal access to the media in election campaigns, increasing the accountability and integrity of campaign financing, and enhancing regulations on the misuse of administrative resources.

¹⁸ For out-of-country voting, the SEC registered 2,569 voters. The required minimum of 10 registered voters to open a polling station was not reached in 20 diplomatic representations; the affected voters were not able to vote. Voters abroad could participate only in the presidential run-off. The holding of parliamentary elections abroad depends on the registration of a sufficient number of voters to elect at least one MP in the out-of-country constituency (5,353 votes for these elections). Since this practical threshold was not met, the SEC decided that the diaspora may not participate in the 2024 parliamentary elections.

¹⁹ A total of 11,095 homebound voters for the presidential run-off and 11,197 for the parliamentary race, 2,147 voters in penal and pre-detention institutions for the presidential run-off and 2,140 for the parliamentary race, 2 internally displaced persons, as well as 534 individuals in healthcare and institutional care facilities registered for early voting.

²⁰ Opposition parties may nominate candidates for SEC chairperson and two members, meanwhile, ruling parties may nominate the deputy chairperson and three members. The current tenure of the SEC began in January 2021. Between February 2023 and late February 2024, the SEC only had six members due to disagreements between the Albanian parliamentary parties over how to implement the clauses of the Electoral Code entitling opposition parties to appoint members to the Commission. The appointment took place upon the withdrawal of one of the nominees, which occurred after the nomination deadline.

such as election-day dispute resolution, election-day instructions and voter identification was inadequate.

MECs are comprised of five members, appointed from state and municipal administration employees for five-year terms. EBs consist of three permanent members, appointed for four years from among state and municipal employees and public servants, as well as two temporary members nominated by political parties.²¹ While there had been a significant turnover in membership of MECs and EBs prior to the first election day, their composition remained largely unchanged before the parliamentary elections.²²

The election administration managed the technical preparations efficiently, met all legal deadlines and maintained public confidence in its technical capacity. However, persistent staff shortages in various SEC departments and the absence of a SEC secretary general since 2021, coupled with reduced funding, led to delays in several elements of the preparations, mainly prior to the 24 April election day.²³ These delays affected the replacement of MEC and EB members, the provision of instructions to lower-level election bodies, logistical arrangements for transporting election materials, and the launch of the voter education campaign.²⁴ The composition of most MECs fulfils the legal criteria for gender (overall 49 per cent of the MEC members are women) and ethnic representation.²⁵ However, only two of the seven SEC members are women (29 per cent), falling short of the required quota.

Ahead of the first round of the presidential election, the SEC developed and implemented a comprehensive training programme for lower-level election bodies and representatives from media, political parties, and CSOs. Training activities continued for EB chairpersons and their substitutes between the two election days, also incorporating discussion on lessons learned from the 24 April election day. During this period, training sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM were well-organized and interactive, with emphasis on biometric voter identification, and the completion of results protocols in the context of two concurrent elections.

Due to administrative challenges in the procurement process and the delayed approval of educational materials by the commission, the SEC launched its broadcast media, leaflet, and online voter education campaign ten days before the 24 April election day, two-weeks later than planned. The voter education campaign primarily featured general messages encouraging participation. After the first election day, additional video spots were introduced, and covered the parallel conduct of voting processes for two elections, ballot validity and prohibited activities during voting. The educational materials were mainly in Macedonian, with subtitles in Albanian, and occasionally also in Romani, Serbian, Turkish, and Vlach languages.

Positively, the SEC made various voter information materials available in accessible formats, published polling station accessibility data online, established a dedicated helpline for voters with hearing

²¹ MEC and non-partisan EB members were appointed in 2021. All MEC and EB members have substitutes.

²² Following the announcement of the elections, some 25 per cent of MEC and 14 per cent of permanent EB members were replaced, due mainly to personal reasons, such as retirement, health or relocation. In five municipalities, the turnover of EB membership was around 50 per cent. The ODIHR EOM observed only a limited number of replacements between the two election days. In this period, the SEC dismissed three EBs in Kumanovo municipality from polling stations that had not opened for voting on the first election day, and one EB in Lipkovo, following the decision of the Administrative Court, establishing procedural irregularities.

²³ Shortcomings were most notable in the IT, budget, and legal departments. The SEC attributes the personnel shortage to unattractive salary conditions that fail to attract skilled professionals and administrative constraints in the recruitment process, which are contingent on budgetary approvals.

²⁴ Several MECs reported that the SEC had not provided them with necessary instructions in a timely manner, hindering election preparations. Additionally, some MECs reported to the ODIHR EOM that they faced inadequate financial resources and delays in their allocation.

²⁵ By law, each gender must comprise at least 30 percent of the membership of every election body. In municipalities where ethnic minorities make up at least 20 percent of the population, these groups must be equitably represented. Out of 80 MECs, 4 did not comply with the gender representation requirement.

impairments, and provided assistive tools, such as ballot templates on election day. Election-day press conferences and SEC sessions between the two election days were interpreted into sign language. However, EBs were not trained on how to use assistive tools, and key information in accessible formats, including voter registration data, remained limited. No additional efforts were made to improve accessibility of electoral premises, including polling stations, between the two election days.

Voter Rights and Registration

Citizens over the age of 18 years are eligible to vote. Inconsistent with international standards and despite previous ODIHR recommendations, persons deprived of legal capacity by a final court decision are disenfranchised.²⁶

The registration system for in-country voting is passive and continuous, based on data from the civil and population registers.²⁷ In line with a previous ODIHR recommendation, the March 2024 legal amendments eliminated the requirement that voters possess a valid identification document to be registered as voters, thus removing an administrative obstacle that had previously limited the constitutional right of otherwise eligible voters.²⁸ As IDs are still necessary to vote, for these elections, as an additional temporary measure to diminish the negative effects of the delays in issuing ID documents invalidated due to the country's name change, voters with IDs that expired within nine months prior to the elections were allowed to use them for identification at the polling station.²⁹

Voters can verify the accuracy of their registration data and request corrections online or in person at SEC regional offices.³⁰ The law does not provide for the voter register to be updated between the two rounds of the presidential election. The SEC informed the IEOM that the 1,148 citizens who turned 18 between the two rounds had been added to the voter lists for the parliamentary elections, but not for the second-round presidential election. These citizens were only allowed to vote in the presidential run-off if they submitted formal complaints at the MECs or SEC and obtained decisions from these bodies. For the parliamentary elections, the voter register included 1,815,350 voters, including 96,010 registered abroad; for the presidential run-off, the register listed 1,814,317 voters, among them 95,116 abroad.

IEOM interlocutors generally did not raise concerns about the inclusiveness of the voter register. However, some pointed to the significant number of citizens residing abroad who remain on the register as they maintain an official residence in-country, which, should these voters choose not to participate in the election, may impact threshold requirements for the presidential run-off, for signature collection in support of independent candidates as well as for constituency delineation. Moreover, persistent

²⁶ Although the Electoral Code foresees a possibility to retain voting rights for individuals whose legal capacity was partially removed, the Constitution and other legislation retain a blanket restriction on voting rights for persons deprived of legal capacity. Article 29 of the 2006 UN [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) requires States to “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. See also paragraph 9.4 of the 2013 CRPD’s Committee’s [Communication No. 4/2011](#), which states that “[...] an exclusion of the right to vote on the basis of a perceived or actual psychosocial or intellectual disability, including a restriction pursuant to an individualized assessment, constitutes discrimination on the basis of disability”.

²⁷ Voters resident in the country are automatically included on in-country voter lists. Citizens temporarily residing abroad may actively register to vote at diplomatic representations or vote in-country according to their last place of residence. In total, 2,569 voters abroad were able to vote in this presidential election run-off.

²⁸ The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) informed the ODIHR EOM that, in practice, this change has not been implemented prior to the elections.

²⁹ For the presidential election, documents that expired on or after 24 July 2023 could be used for voter identification; for the parliamentary race, documents expiring on or after 8 August 2024 were accepted. On 7 May, the MoIA announced that all citizens who applied for the renewal of their IDs until 3 May, could collect them by election day.

³⁰ Following a public scrutiny of the voter registration data at the SEC regional offices from 28 February to 18 March, the SEC received 143 requests from voters, based on which it made 70 corrections as well as added 53 and removed 20 voters. Eight political parties requested an electronic copy of the register for additional scrutiny; none of them requested any corrections.

shortcomings in the residential address registration and civil registration systems continue to diminish data accuracy.³¹ Previous ODIHR recommendations to ensure data accuracy, harmonize all relevant databases and to audit the voter register remained unaddressed ahead of the elections.

Candidate Rights and Registration

Parliamentary candidates must be eligible voters of at least 18 years of age on election day. The law retains a blanket restriction on candidacy rights in the parliamentary elections for those sentenced to imprisonment, irrespective of the gravity of the offense, and without individualized assessment of the case, which does not fully meet the principle of proportionality enshrined in international standards and OSCE commitments.³² Citizens who are registered voters and over the age of 40 by election day, with at least 10 years of residency in the country over the past 15 years, may stand for president.

Parliamentary candidates may be nominated by political parties, pre-electoral coalitions, or stand independently. Independent candidacies were to be supported by the signatures of 1,000 voters.³³ Signatures had to be collected at the premises of 34 SEC regional offices and designated notaries between 28 February and 8 March. In line with the law, voters were permitted to sign in support of more than one candidate list. The law mandates a minimum representation of 40 per cent of each gender on every candidate list, stipulating that one candidate of the less represented gender must be included among every three consecutive candidates, with at least one additional candidate of this gender for every ten candidates. At odds with international good practice, the law requires that parliamentary candidates disclose their ethnic identity in order to register.³⁴

Candidate nomination for the parliamentary elections concluded on 2 April. The SEC checked the candidate registration documents and provided contestants with 48 hours to address any omissions or shortcomings identified.³⁵ While the SEC complied with the legal deadlines in all cases, it reported difficulties in meeting these deadlines in some instances, which it attributed to the delayed provision of personal and criminal record data by state authorities.

In an inclusive process, the SEC registered 1,680 parliamentary candidates nominated by 12 political parties and 5 coalitions.³⁶ It rejected the registration of nine candidate lists for failing to comply with

³¹ The MoIA informed the ODIHR EOM that the enforcement of provisions mandating individuals to declare address changes is inconsistent. According to the 2023 amendments to the Law on Identification Documents, the records of citizens aged 65 and older are maintained permanently in the civil register unless a death is officially reported, a process that is not uniformly executed. Due to unreliable data, the civil registers include records of voters of unrealistically high age as well as those registered at non-existent addresses.

³² Paragraph 24 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) provides that “any restriction on rights and freedoms must, in a democratic society, relate to one of the objectives of the applicable law and be strictly proportionate to the aim of the law”. See also Article 14 of the [2006 UN Committee on Human Rights General Comment 25](#).

³³ The number of candidates on every list, including for independent candidates, must equal the number of seats in the district. The March 2024 legal amendments changed the signature requirement from a fixed number per district to one per cent of registered voters; however, this provision was not applicable for these elections, since they entered into effect after the end of signature collection period.

³⁴ See Article 64 para 2 of the Electoral Code. The 2002 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission’s [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#), I.2.4.c states that such declarations should not be compulsory. See also the [2013](#) and [2016](#) ODIHR and Council of Europe’s Venice Commission Joint Opinions on the Electoral Code.

³⁵ According to the SEC, an undisclosed number of submitters were required to correct shortcomings, such as non-compliance with gender quota, lacking criminal record certificates or statements of ethnic community affiliation, insufficient number of candidates included in the individual lists, replacement of non-eligible candidates and other mistakes in nomination documents.

³⁶ The registered candidate lists, in sequential order, were: 1. SDSM-led coalition “for European Future”; 2. VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition “Your Macedonia”; 3. GROM-led coalition “Bravely for Macedonia”; 4. BDI/DUI-led coalition “European Front”; 5. *the Left*; 6. VLEN/VREDI coalition; 7. Movement ZNAM “For Our Macedonia”; 8. United Macedonia; 9. Political Party New Alternative; 10. Party AVAJA; 11. European Citizen Movement; 12. Macedonian Third Era – Sovereignists; 13. Your Party; 14. Motherland Macedonia; 15. Political Party *the Right*; 16. Political Party Democrats; 17. Workers’ Party.

the legal requirements, such as the submission deadline, gender quota, the number of candidates, or for missing requisite documents. Three political parties appealed to the Administrative Court, which upheld the respective SEC decisions (see *Election Dispute Resolution*). All registered candidate lists met the gender requirements. Women comprised 43 per cent of all parliamentary candidates. However, women only headed 21 of the 84 lists (25 per cent), and women candidates were often placed in the lowest positions allowed by the law.³⁷ Of the registered candidates, 14 per cent fell within the age range of 18 to 29 years.

For the 24 April presidential election, the SEC had registered seven candidates, including two women. Six candidates were supported by groups of voters and one by members of parliament. One of the two presidential candidates in the presidential run-off was a woman. Legal amendments adopted on 1 April, one day before the candidate nomination period concluded, permitted parliamentary candidate lists from parties or coalitions that endorsed presidential candidates to be listed in the same order on the parliamentary ballot as they were on the presidential ballot. Most contestants utilized these sequential numbers for campaign purposes on billboards, posters, and advertisements.

Election Campaign

The official parliamentary campaign commenced on 18 April and concluded on 6 May, thus overlapping with the presidential campaign period that had begun on 4 April. The law does not stipulate the official start of the campaign period for the second round of the presidential election. In practice, both presidential candidates resumed their campaigns one day after the first election day, prior to the official announcement of a run-off. For the parliamentary and presidential elections, the rules on the distribution of campaign funding, media time, and resources factor the representation of political parties in the parliament, advantaging the four main parliamentary parties, and limiting the opportunities for all candidates to campaign equally. By law, up to 90 per cent of the budgetary funds earmarked for campaigning, airtime, billboards, and poster space were allocated to the four major parliamentary parties, namely, SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, BDI/DUI, and Besa, equally divided between the two major ruling and the two major opposition parties.

The campaign was competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected. There was a significant overlap between the presidential and parliamentary races, with political parties, as well as parliamentary and presidential candidates, holding large-scale rallies, canvassing door-to-door, and disseminating flyers, posters, billboards, and digital content. Prominent themes of the campaign included the economy, countering corruption, EU accession, the country's foreign policy, and potential constitutional changes. Between the two election days, parties also focused on local issues, such as infrastructure and regional development. As the campaign progressed, the tone became increasingly negative, with *ad hominem* attacks and occasional threats.³⁸ Instances of discriminatory rhetoric were observed throughout the

³⁷ Women were placed first in 25 per cent of candidate lists, second on 27 per cent, and third on 57 per cent. Out of the lists registered in all six districts, the *Democrats* had three women placed at the top of the lists, the GROM and SDSM-led lists had two, the *Left*, *Macedonian Third Era–Sovereignists*, VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, and ZNAM had one each. The BDI/DUI-led coalition, *Motherland Macedonia* and VLEN/VREDI coalitions had no women leading their lists.

³⁸ For example, incidents during the campaign include a verbal attack on a TV crew by VMRO-DPMNE supporters at a rally on 4 April; a billboard featuring the presidential candidate endorsed by VLEN/VREDI in Skopje was set on fire on 7 April; on 9 April, the SDSM leader accused VMRO-DPMNE of using pressure tactics and threatening journalists; on 10 April, the Secretary General of VMRO-DPMNE called for an end to “SDSM’s corruption” at an event in Krushevo; and on 11 April, at a rally in Bosilovo, the VMRO-DPMNE leader framed the election as a choice between a “proud Macedonia” and an SDSM that acts “as pawns to BDI/DUI”. The office of a VMRO-DPMNE MP in Kochani was broken into on 22 April, and on 1 May, the HQ of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), part of SDSM-led coalition, was reported to be vandalized. On 28 April, the *Left* office of Aerodrom district in Skopje reported that one of their activists was attacked and his campaign materials taken away. On 3 May, VMRO-DPMNE in Strumica reported a physical assault against the head of their youth wing.

campaign period, including the use of nationalistic slogans, and in some cases conflating the perceived actions of political parties with ethnic communities.³⁹

The parliamentary and presidential campaigns featured few women political figures overall, with women making up only 30 per cent of the speakers appearing at rallies observed by the ODIHR EOM, and did little to engage women voters who were 34 per cent of the attendees at these events.⁴⁰ One of the two candidates in the presidential run-off was a woman. Issues related to gender equality were largely neglected in the campaign discourse, except by the presidential candidate endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition. In most other events, references to women pertained to their roles within the family, reflecting long-standing gender stereotypes and discrimination against non-traditional families.⁴¹ Youth issues received limited attention in the campaign, primarily focusing on the emigration of young people. In the campaign events observed, 26 per cent of the attendees were youth.

The Electoral Code contains some regulations aimed at preventing the misuse of administrative resources prior to elections. In the period leading up to the parliamentary elections, several IEOM interlocutors raised allegations and concerns about vote buying in vulnerable communities, including the Roma and Turks, as well as pressure on voters, mainly public sector employees.⁴² The law prohibits the launching of public development projects, extraordinary budgetary disbursements, and employment procedures using budgetary funds after the elections are called. The inauguration of public projects is prohibited starting 20 days before the campaign period. Despite these regulations aimed at preventing the misuse of administrative resources prior to elections, the ODIHR EOM observed that several local public infrastructure projects were announced or inaugurated by mayors, government officials, and MP candidates throughout the campaign period.⁴³ The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) is responsible for overseeing compliance with the relevant provisions (see *Campaign Finance*). In addition, some IEOM interlocutors claimed that many public employment and procurement procedures had been initiated shortly prior to the respective ban taking effect.

³⁹ For example, on 7 April, *the Left*'s Facebook account shared a message stating that "it is time to put an end to the influence of the DUI-zation and the Albanization of Macedonia". During the campaign period, *the Left* made several derogatory comments against Bulgaria, Bulgarians and the EU. On 18 April, on the Facebook account of the leader of *the Left*, the following message was posted: "Bulgarians in the Constitution is a treason, today begins the Bulgarian fascist occupation of Macedonia". On 29 April, *the Left*'s leader posted a political programme calling for ethnic Macedonian state officials and the abolishment of political parties organized on the basis of ethnicity. Politicians from BDI/DUI publicly voiced interpretations that VMRO-DPMNE's slogan "Make Macedonia Yours" is chauvinistic and anti-Albanian.

⁴⁰ ODIHR EOM Long-term Observers (LTOs) observed 79 campaign events of 7 political parties and 6 presidential candidates. Of these, there were 19 presidential campaign events, 12 parliamentary events and 48 events covering both the parliamentary and presidential race. In total, 92 per cent of the campaign venues were accessible to persons with physical disabilities.

⁴¹ For example, on 25 and 29 April, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE, during rallies in Kichevo and Gjorche Petrov, stated "marriage is a union, not between parent one and parent two, but between a man and a woman".

⁴² On 6 May, the MoIA reported that two individuals were arrested in Chashka municipality on charges of vote buying. In the campaign period, ODIHR EOM LTOs reported having heard allegations of vote buying and pressure on voters from the municipalities of Bitola, Chair, Delchevo, Gjorche Petrov, Gostivar, Lozovo, Karbinci, Kochani, Kumanovo, Negotino, Shtip, Shuto Orizari, Tetovo, and Vinica, in connection with most major political parties, including BDI/DUI, SDSM, VLEN/VREDI, and VMRO-DPMNE.

⁴³ Between the announcement of the elections and the 24 April election day, the ODIHR EOM observed nine instances of infrastructure projects initiated or inaugurated by mayors or ministers. Further examples include: on 25 April, the VMRO-DPMNE mayor of Kisela Voda announced a reconstruction of parts of a few streets. On 26 April, the mayor of Petrovec district of Skopje, member of VMRO-DPMNE, and some MPs, conducted a walk-through inspection of a street reconstruction. The same day, the mayor of Skopje and a candidate of New Alternative announced new green areas. On 26, 28 and 30 April, the mayor of Aerodrom district of Skopje and vice-president of VMRO-DPMNE, on different occasions and with the presence of prominent VMRO-DPMNE members, launched reconstruction and construction projects. On 29 April, representatives of the Karpos district of Skopje announced the end of a road reconstruction. See Paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#), which requires "a clear separation between the state and political parties".

Ethnic Albanian parties featured prominently in the campaign. In addition to the two presidential candidates in the first round, eight ethnic Albanian political parties participated in the parliamentary race as part of the coalitions led by BUI/DUI and VLEN/VREDI. BDI/DUI entered a coalition with other ethnic minority parties, including Bosniaks, Roma and Turks. One Albanian party, *European Citizen Movement*, ran independently. One political party, AVAJA, focusing on Roma representation, registered candidate lists in four districts. Campaign messages were mostly presented in Macedonian and Albanian, with Bosnian, Romani, Serbian, Turkish, and Vlach languages used in some cases.⁴⁴ Several ethnic minority party representatives reported to the ODIHR EOM the distribution of state campaign funds according to a formula based on parties' representation in parliament hampered their ability to campaign on an equal footing.

Campaigning on social networks is not regulated. The ODIHR EOM followed the online activities of the leaders of the main parties contesting the parliamentary elections and all presidential candidates.⁴⁵ Most campaign messages promoted candidates and programmes in a neutral tone, with the tone becoming increasingly negative with the official start of the parliamentary campaign, and remained so between the two election days.⁴⁶ Campaign content included videos, photographs, descriptions of meetings and speeches. Between 21 March and 8 May, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE had the highest level of online engagement (753,082 interactions), followed by the presidential candidate endorsed by VLEN/VREDI (300,467 interactions), and the presidential candidate endorsed by SDSM (283,002 interactions).

Although many contestants used claims of disinformation as part of their campaign tactics, these were mainly claims of candidates misrepresenting their accomplishments or support and did not allege disinformation targeted at critical election processes such as voter information.⁴⁷ There were no organized state efforts to identify and address disinformation or manipulative content during the pre-electoral period.

Campaign Finance

Overall, deficiencies and inconsistencies in the legal framework, limited financial and human resources for the oversight bodies, the limited information exchange between these institutions, as well as the narrow interpretation of the law by the relevant institutions diminished the effectiveness of campaign finance oversight. Key election stakeholders, including from the oversight institutions, did not have full confidence in the effectiveness of campaign finance monitoring and accountability for the misuse of administrative resources in the campaign.

Political parties that received at least one per cent of the votes in the previous parliamentary or local elections are eligible for public funding, which may also be used for parliamentary and presidential

⁴⁴ For example, alongside with Macedonian language, the Serbian Party of Macedonia posted messages online in Serbian; the Party-Movement of the Turks, part of SDSM-led coalition, the Democratic Party of the Turks and the presidential candidate endorsed by BDI/DUI shared campaign messages in Turkish; the Bosniak Democratic Union campaigned in Bosnian; the Union of the Roma Party and AVAJA campaigned in Romani; and the Vlach Party of Macedonia, part of the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, shared campaign messages in Vlach language.

⁴⁵ The ODIHR EOM observed the Facebook accounts of presidential candidates, political parties and their leaders starting from 21 March.

⁴⁶ For example, on 9 April, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE stated: "Pendarovski's entire campaign consists of a Balkan macho with cheap primitive insults to a beautiful woman", referencing the opposition candidate. On 21 April, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE accused the government and the authorities, including the SEC, of planning to manipulate the votes in the upcoming elections. On 26 April, a post on the SDSM Facebook account accused VMRO-DPMNE of "playing a dangerous game" with ethnic tensions that can take the country back "to the ugly past".

⁴⁷ For example, in a high-visibility case, on 2 April, a journalist published an action plan of VMRO-DPMNE that allegedly involved the creation of fake opinion polls. VMRO-DPMNE reacted by stating that the action plan in question was a falsification by their political opponents.

campaigns, without any legally specified limits.⁴⁸ While there is no direct public funding allocated for election campaigns, the state directly reimburses media outlets registered with the SEC for campaign advertisements. The formula for these reimbursements favours the largest ruling and opposition coalitions in the parliament, disadvantaging small and non-parliamentary parties, inconsistent with the principle of equal opportunity to campaign and OSCE commitments.⁴⁹

Parliamentary campaigns may also be financed through monetary and in-kind donations, and loans. Individual citizens can donate up to EUR 3,000, while legal entities may contribute up to EUR 30,000 per campaign.⁵⁰ Donations can also be made even after the final results are announced, a practice that some IEOM interlocutors, including those from oversight institutions, considered as increasing the potential for clientelism. For these elections, the funding reported by parliamentary contestants as received from donations was significantly lower than the funds allocated for campaign reimbursement by the state.⁵¹ By law, the expenditure limit is set at MKD 110 per election, per registered voter in an electoral district.⁵² Third-party campaigning and paid political advertisements on social networking platforms are not explicitly regulated.⁵³

Electoral contestants in both parliamentary and presidential elections are required to compile three interim campaign finance reports, two in advance of the elections and a third after the elections. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, these reports cannot be submitted electronically and are not audited. All contestant reports must also be sent to the SAO, SCPC and the SEC, which are obliged to publish the reports on their websites. A final financial report must be submitted to the SAO within 60 days after the election results are announced, with an audit to be completed within a further 60 days. Some parliamentary contestants did not submit their interim reports in a timely manner or in the required format.⁵⁴ Pursuant to the March 2024 legal amendments, interim reports are no longer required to include information on campaign expenditures, but only cover contributions. Moreover, the instructions provided by the Ministry of Finance for interim and final financial reporting excluded requirements for

⁴⁸ In 2023, the total state funding allocated for parliamentary parties was approximately EUR 6.5 million.

⁴⁹ The amount of funds allocated by the SEC for this purpose was approximately EUR 3.6 million for parliamentary elections. Of this amount, 45 per cent was shared between SDSM and BDI/DUI-led coalitions; another 45 per cent between VMRO-DPMNE and VLEN/VREDI-led coalitions; 7 per cent between *the Left* and GROM-led coalition, and 3 per cent was shared among remaining 11 candidate lists that do not have representation in the outgoing parliament. For each of the two presidential candidates in the run-off, 45 per cent of the additionally allocated amount of EUR 1.8 million was made available. Paragraph 7.6 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to provide “political parties and organizations with the necessary legal guarantees to enable them to compete with each other on a basis of equal treatment before the law”. See also appendix, articles 1 and 8 of the Council of Europe’s [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)4](#) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Common Rules against Corruption in the Funding of Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns. See also the [2009 Council of Europe’s Venice Commission Code of good practice in the field of political parties](#), paragraph 163.

⁵⁰ Donations from foreign or anonymous sources, municipal governments, state-owned companies, religious and charitable organizations, and from the media, are prohibited.

⁵¹ Reported donations from individuals and legal entities were EUR 659,077; out of this sum, 87 per cent was accounted by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition.

⁵² One euro equals MKD 61 (Macedonian denar). The overall expenditure limit for parliamentary campaigns is set at approximately EUR 3.2 million, divided by electoral district based on the number of voters.

⁵³ According to the [Meta Ad Library](#), during the period 18 April-4 May, candidate lists, parties that support them and their lead individuals spent a total of EUR 100,951 on advertising, with the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition spending EUR 44,485 and the SDSM-led coalition spending EUR 25,014. Simultaneously, two presidential candidates in the run-off campaign directly incurred total advertising costs of approximately EUR 12,035. Of this expenditure, the presidential candidate endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition accounted for EUR 7,871, while the candidate endorsed by SDSM-led coalition accounted for EUR 4,164.

⁵⁴ Only 10 of the 17 parliamentary contestants submitted their first interim reports in line with the legal provisions. The SCPC did not initiate any proceedings against those violating the rules of submission. The day before the elections, both presidential candidates in the run-off also submitted their interim reports; one reported no donations in the reporting period. Of the total of 34 reports required in parliamentary race, only 22 were timely submitted. Nine contained no information on donations, and 1 reported a donation from an unlawful source. Only five reports included information on funds transferred from political parties’ regular accounts. The SAO, the SEC and the SCPC posted the first reports online the day after submission, while second reports were published promptly by the SCPC.

information important for financial oversight, leading to political parties submitting non-uniform or incomplete interim reports, and reducing transparency and accountability.⁵⁵

The SCPC can initiate investigations into alleged violations of campaign finance rules either *ex officio*, including based on unofficial reports, or upon receipt of a formal complaint, and must issue a resolution within five days. Since the announcement of the elections, the SCPC initiated 42 cases based on unofficial reports and 3 *ex officio*, applying a general deadline of 60 days, rather than the legally determined five days, which was only applied to one formal complaint.⁵⁶ Due to financial constraints and unlike in previous elections, the SCPC did not deploy field monitors to identify the potential misuse of administrative resources and campaign spending, nor did it inspect contestants' bank accounts during the campaign, failing to cross-check reported campaign expenditures with actual spending.⁵⁷

Media

The media landscape is diverse, with 40 television and 58 radio stations, 22 print media outlets, and over 200 online portals. Although television is the main source of information, online portals have had an increasingly significant influence on the media environment, in particular during elections. While the environment is generally conducive to media freedom, the quality of journalism is negatively affected by political fragmentation and ethnic divisions, intense competition among numerous media outlets in a constrained market, and unfavourable working conditions of journalists. The November 2022 amendments to the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, along with the February 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code, introduced additional safeguards for journalists. However, online attacks, including those against women, and isolated incidents of physical assault against journalists remain a concern.⁵⁸

Changes to the Law on Media and the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services in March 2024 extended public subsidies to include print media, and lifted the ban on state-funded advertisements in private media for public interest campaigns. Although the stated aim of the changes was to support media sustainability, many IEOM interlocutors criticized these changes as likely to increase political influence over the media. Many interlocutors highlighted the need for further reforms in the media sector to enhance the viability of outlets, regulate online media, and further align the legal framework with the EU *acquis* with respect to strengthening the independence and capacity of the media regulator and the public broadcaster.

The Electoral Code requires that all media outlets, including online news portals, provide fair and balanced election coverage. The public broadcaster is obliged to air free political promotion, whereas

⁵⁵ According to the instruction of the Ministry of Finance, interim reporting does not have to include information on in-kind contributions, loans, and funds transferred by political parties. Paragraph 261 of the 2020 ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that it is good practice to require reports providing oversight bodies and the public with preliminary information on campaign incomes and expenses several days before election day. Paragraph 258 states that digitalizing information and submitting it to the regulatory body in easily searchable and reusable form can facilitate oversight.

⁵⁶ Most cases were related to violations of provisions that prohibit new investments and employments, as well as public promotion of state-funded projects after the election announcement. For nine of these cases, even this general rule of 60 days was not respected, and these cases resolutions were still pending as of election day.

⁵⁷ The SCPC announced a vacancy notice for analysts of campaign finance reports only two days before the parliamentary campaign started, some two months after elections announcement.

⁵⁸ According to the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM), in 2024, a journalist was physically attacked and injured during an interview in Kichevo and was later arrested following a physical incident. The journalist was subsequently released but faces criminal charges. Many IEOM interlocutors reported regular online attacks, with a growing number of cases against women journalists. Often, these cases are not reported or prosecuted. The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) did not report any further incidents between the two election days. On 24 April, reportedly, one journalist faced obstruction conducting her professional duty in a polling station in Skopje.

other types of media are entitled to offer paid political advertisements. Many IEOM interlocutors were critical of the fact that the state pays directly for all media coverage which they perceive as entrenching media dependence on state funds. Many IEOM interlocutors asserted that a significant number of the news portals which registered for campaign advertising were created immediately prior to the elections in order to receive state funds during election campaigns and, in some cases, to channel these funds to political parties.⁵⁹

The public broadcaster Macedonian Radio and Television (*MRT*) is funded almost entirely from the state budget. Its news coverage is subject to stringent regulations during the campaign period.⁶⁰ The obligation to adhere to strict time allocations constrains editorial freedom and provides disproportionately more time to larger parties, despite previous ODIHR recommendations.

The Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AAVMS) is mandated with overseeing compliance with media regulations. During the campaign periods for both the presidential and parliamentary elections, it submitted periodic reports to the SEC based on its media monitoring, and also published its findings online.⁶¹ It adopted several election-related guidelines, including on campaign silence regulations in the media and distribution of airtime among contestants, and amended the latter between the two electoral rounds.⁶² The AAVMS initiated misdemeanor proceedings against *Klan Macedonia* for violating election silence and failing to adjust its newscasts for persons with disabilities, and against *Alfa TV* for exceeding the legal limits on paid political advertising. The broadcasters were fined and their appeals are pending. Although online media is largely unregulated, a coordination body consisting of representatives of the AAVMS and CSOs has been created to register and publish related notifications, but this body lacks enforcement powers. The AAVMS also developed a voluntary code of conduct in the online sphere.⁶³

The ODIHR EOM media monitoring results show that the election-related coverage in broadcast media was overall balanced and neutral in tone.⁶⁴ The public broadcaster *MRT* covered all parliamentary

⁵⁹ All interested private media had to announce their price lists for paid political advertisements, whereas online news portals were additionally required to register with the SEC. For the presidential and parliamentary elections, 39 TV stations, 37 radio stations, 11 print outlets, and 251 internet portals registered with the SEC. The State Public Prosecutor's office informed the ODIHR EOM that previous investigations into the legitimacy of some internet portals participating in election campaigns were terminated, as no elements of criminal activity could be determined.

⁶⁰ By law, the public broadcaster is obliged to dedicate 70 per cent of its newscast coverage to electoral contestants on *MRT 1* and *2*. The Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AAVMS) allocated 30 per cent of the time combined to the presidential candidate and parliamentary lists led by SDSM and BDI/DUI. A further 30 per cent were assigned to the presidential candidate and parliamentary lists led by VMRO-DPMNE, VLEN/VREDI, *the Left* and GROM, and 10 per cent divided among all other contestants in the parliamentary elections. The AAVMS allocated three hours of media presentations on the Parliamentary Channel to all contestants in the parliamentary elections with parliamentary representation and one hour of presentations to contestants without representation in the parliament.

⁶¹ The AAVMS rejected a statement aired on *Alfa TV* alleging that the AAVMS interferes in the broadcaster's editorial policy by prescribing equal coverage of all contestants.

⁶² On 25 April, the AAVMS amended its guidelines for broadcasters, which stipulate that media access provided for presidential and parliamentary candidates, including presentations on public and private channels, is distributed in line with their political party endorsements. According to the amended guidelines, the budget-funded 9.5 minutes per hour for the parliamentary elections is allocated as follows: four minutes to the SDSM-led and BDI/DUI-led coalitions, four minutes to the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition and VLEN/VREDI, one minute to *the Left* and the GROM-led coalition, and 30 seconds to the contestants without representation in the parliament. An additional 8 minutes per hour was to be shared between the two contestants in the presidential run-off (maximum 4 minutes per candidate).

⁶³ The AAVMS informed the ODIHR EOM that, prior to the beginning of the campaign period, three political parties and 22 media outlets pledged to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#).

⁶⁴ The ODIHR EOM monitoring includes the public broadcasters *MRT 1* and *MRT 2* (in Albanian), the private broadcasters *Sitel*, *Kanal 5*, *Alsat-M* (in Albanian), *Alfa TV* and *Telma*, as well as the online portals *kurir.mk*, *plusinfo.mk*, along with *tetotavsot.com* and *lajmpress.org* (in Albanian). It started its quantitative and qualitative monitoring of election-related prime-time coverage on 1 April.

contestants in line with the legal provisions establishing a framework for allocating time to political parties in elections, which privileges those already holding seats in parliament. Broadcasters focused on the major parties and coalitions, with SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, BDI/DUI, and VLEN/VREDI receiving most prime-time coverage overall. The coalitions led by SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE dominated private broadcasters (24 and 27 per cent of coverage each), both largely in neutral tone. Whereas *Alsat-M* and *Telma* provided more balanced coverage than other monitored broadcasters (between 15 and 23 per cent of the coverage on both channels was provided to each of the coalitions endorsed by the main four parties in the parliament), *Kanal 5* primarily focused on SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE (28 per cent and 34 per cent respectively), largely neutral in tone. Among the online news portals, *Kurir.mk* devoted 74 per cent of its coverage to the candidate endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE, and *Tetovasot.com* dedicated 68 per cent to the BDI/DUI candidate, both in a largely positive tone.

The media provided extensive coverage of the parliamentary and presidential campaigns. There were several televised debates featuring contestants running for the major coalitions in the parliamentary elections, as well as three debates between the two candidates in the presidential run-off, which gave voters the ability to make an informed choice. Whereas most broadcasters allocated time to the two presidential contestants in the run-off equally, private broadcasters *Alfa TV* dedicated most coverage to the candidate endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE (68 per cent). Online news portals *Kurir.mk* and *Tetovasot.com* focused on candidates endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE (64 per cent) and BDI/DUI (47 per cent) respectively, while *Lajmpress.org* covered the candidate endorsed by VLEN/VREDI most extensively (40 per cent), in a largely positive tone. *Plusinfo.mk* was more balanced and neutral in tone in its presidential run-off campaign coverage.

Some of the legal amendments introduced in March 2024 included changes aimed at improving the accessibility of electoral news to persons with disabilities. Broadcasters were obliged to adjust one edition of their newscasts and one piece of election-related content per day to accommodate persons with sensory impairments. Positively, in line with the law, national public and private broadcasters monitored by the ODIHR EOM supplemented parts of their prime-time content with subtitles or sign language throughout the electoral campaign.⁶⁵

Election Dispute Resolution

Regulations on mechanisms for election dispute resolution are in place, but some prior ODIHR recommendations, including those related to limited standing and restrictive deadlines, remain unaddressed. The SEC has the mandate to decide on the majority of complaints, and its decisions can be appealed to the Administrative Court. Deadlines for filing and reviewing complaints are overly short, at odds with international good practice, and appear insufficient for preparing meaningful applications and issuing decisions.⁶⁶ The regulation of election dispute resolution contains numerous ambiguities and gaps, including with respect to conflicting deadlines, and parallel avenues for submission.⁶⁷ At odds with previous ODIHR recommendations and international good practice, the legal standing of voters to

⁶⁵ Except for *Klan Macedonia*, all broadcasters adjusted parts of their campaign period content accordingly. However, *MRT 2* did not provide sign language in Albanian. A list of accessible programmes was published on the AAVMS website.

⁶⁶ The SEC is required by law to resolve voter registration complaints within 2-4 hours and address complaints related to election campaigns and challenges to election results within 72 hours. The Administrative Court makes decisions on appeals within 24-48 hours. Paragraph 95 of the Explanatory Report to the 2002 Council of Europe's Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states that "time limits must [...] be long enough to make an appeal possible, to guarantee the exercise of rights of defense and a reflected decision. A time limit of three to five days at first instance (both for lodging appeals and making rulings) seems reasonable".

⁶⁷ Parallel submissions are stipulated to SEC regional offices, MECs, and the SEC. Articles 50-a, 148, 149, and 151 prescribe different deadlines for resolving identical issues. Procedures and applicants in Article 151 are not specified, and this article prescribes different deadlines compared to procedures under Article 148, although their scopes at least partially overlap, see also Article 69-a in conjunction with Articles 73 and 179-b (1). See paragraph II.3.3. of the 2002 Council of Europe's Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#).

file complaints remains limited to cases regarding voter lists and their individual voting rights. The right to appeal election results is limited to the representatives of those that signed in support of the candidates.⁶⁸ Moreover, before the second election day, the SEC had still not aligned its instructions on election dispute resolution with recent changes to the Electoral Code.⁶⁹

The SEC reported that it did not receive any complaints before the first round of the presidential election. On the first election day, the SEC reported receiving 362 complaints, all of which related to the right to vote. The SEC did not ensure effective legal remedy for complaints submitted on election day, with approximately half of the complaints submitted on the 24 April election day remaining unresolved by the close of the polls.⁷⁰ Further, no justification was provided for the majority of the SEC decisions on complaints that were available to the ODIHR EOM to review, and many decisions contained varying deficiencies, undermining the effectiveness of legal remedy. Between the two election days, the SEC received additional 245 complaints on voter registration. Of 610 voter registration complaints received by the SEC in the period between 24 April and 8 May, less than 50 per cent (274) were decided by the 8 May election day (168 were granted, 106 were rejected), and only 39 of these were examined in a public session. The rejection by the SEC of a complaint by a contestant alleging election fraud in one polling station in Lipkovo municipality was overturned by the Administrative Court, as the court found the SEC had failed to comprehensively examine the election materials.

The Administrative Court reviewed two appeals related to the registration of voters and four to the registration of parliamentary candidate lists by the SEC. The appeals about voter registration were granted, while those on candidate registration were denied as unfounded, as the Court considered that the applicants failed to convincingly demonstrate that the contested decisions by the SEC violated their rights or the law.⁷¹ The court also upheld an SCPC decision on violation of the ban on employment ahead of the first-round election day, after two rounds of revisions.⁷² The Administrative Court generally complied with the short deadlines but in two cases its procedural approach lacked consistency.⁷³ Moreover, at odds with the legal provisions, it failed to publish its decisions on voter registration on election day, and did not conduct public sessions for these cases despite being required to do so by law. The Court decided on election-related disputes in panels of three judges, although the law prescribes five-judge panels for such cases.

⁶⁸ In one case between the two election days, the Administrative Court considered a presidential candidate a legitimate applicant in such a dispute. Paragraph II.3.3(f) of the 2002 Council of Europe's Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recommends that "[all] candidates and all voters registered in the constituency concerned must be entitled to appeal. A reasonable quorum may be imposed for appeals by voters on the results of elections".

⁶⁹ See the [SEC Instruction on the Manner and Procedure for Resolving the Complaints Within the Authority of SEC](#). For example, the instruction references the Constitutional Court as the due avenue for voters' appeals.

⁷⁰ The ODIHR EOM was able to obtain 72 decisions, all of which cited the Supreme Court as the appellate instance, which, by law, has no jurisdiction to review SEC decisions. All but four decisions were unmotivated, while 17 of the 33 rejections cited a 2018 SEC guideline related to referenda that is not applicable to the presidential election. Paragraph 5.11 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) states that "administrative decisions against a person must be fully justifiable and must as a rule indicate the usual remedies available".

⁷¹ Two appeals were submitted against SEC decisions by the *Workers' Party*, alleging overly restrictive registration rules that led to the dismissal of their candidate lists in five electoral districts. The *New Alternative* appealed arguing that the SEC dismissed their candidate lists on formalistic grounds. Additionally, *the Right* appealed against the SEC decision rejecting the registration of the party's candidates due to missing documents in their application.

⁷² This decision was examined by the Higher Administrative Court, which rejected the complaint as unfounded.

⁷³ While the two complaints regarding voter registration were similar, one decision required the SEC to review the applicant's status, and the other ordered the voter's registration. Under the Law on Administrative Disputes, the Administrative Court may relinquish cases for decisions at first instance. In the appeal against the SCPC decision, the Court requested a new examination at the first instance due to procedural violations, and upheld the decision on second review, considering the violations addressed.

The basic court in Tetovo handled two requests for party leadership registration from the two factions of the Alliance of Albanians; a decision was made after recusals of three judges, allegedly due to political pressure.⁷⁴ The Constitutional Court received two petitions: one challenging the AAVMS guidelines on the distribution of media airtime among presidential candidates, and another questioning the constitutionality of the Electoral Code with respect to campaign conditions for candidates nominated by groups of voters, without affiliation to political parties, which the appellants claimed to be discriminatory. The Constitutional Court did not review the petitions in a timely manner; one was reviewed and rejected after the challenged provisions had already been implemented, while the second remained undecided prior to the 8 May election day, which the Court attributed to the lack of expedited deadlines for constitutional review.⁷⁵

Many IEOM interlocutors voiced doubts about the fairness of adjudication of election-related complaints, citing the potential for political influence, possible interruptions in inter-agency cooperation, a backlog of unresolved disputes, as well as the perceived potential for corruption within the judiciary and law enforcement agencies.⁷⁶

Election Observation

The Electoral Code allows for citizen and international observation, and entitles registered contestants to appoint authorized representatives to follow the entire election process, and all levels of the election administration, contributing to transparency. The SEC accredited 2 citizen and 6 international observer groups ahead of the parliamentary elections, along with an additional 383 citizen and 241 international observers from organizations accredited before the first round of the presidential election, thus raising the total number to 1,303 citizen and 771 international observers.⁷⁷ Although the legislation does not explicitly regulate the validity of accreditations issued before presidential election for run-offs, in practice, the SEC has interpreted that these remain valid through the completion of the entire electoral process.

Citizen observer activities were generally minimal prior to the first round of the presidential election, as well as between the two election days. Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors attributed this to a lack of funding and a shift in the orientation of activities. *CIVIL – Center for Freedom* and *Roma for Democracy* provided regular updates on their observations throughout both election days. *CIVIL* representatives reported to the ODIHR EOM that, during the campaign period, they were subject to hostile verbal attacks on social media in connection with their activities.

Roma for Democracy reported that on the first election day, two of their observers received direct threats from party representatives at polling stations in Strumica municipality, while other observers had reportedly been hindered in their work by EB members in Kumanovo, Kichevo, Strumica, Shuto Orizari, and Vinica municipalities. The organization held a demonstration on 2 May, requesting

⁷⁴ The recusals were initiated by one of the factions due to alleged conflicts of interest: one was motivated by perceived bias, and another by a friendship between a deceased family member of a judge and the leader of the opposing faction. Additionally, a third judge filed for self-recusal immediately upon being assigned to the case. IEOM interlocutors maintained that the recusals of the three judges assigned to the case and informal withdrawal of two other judges from resolving it were politically motivated. The Court confirmed Zeyadin Sela as the leader of the Alliance of Albanians.

⁷⁵ On 14 March 2024, a group of voters challenged the constitutionality of the Electoral Code and its amendments, claiming that they do not ensure the equality of contestants, disadvantaging independent candidates.

⁷⁶ The 2023 OSCE [Corruption Risk Assessment of the Judiciary of North Macedonia](#) highlighted a decline in trust within the judiciary and law enforcement, alongside a rise in vulnerabilities to corruption. See also the [announcement](#) of the cessation of cooperation between the public prosecutor and the SCPC concerning the prosecution of corruption cases. ODIHR EOM interlocutors from the judiciary cited political interference in dispute resolution, mainly related to high-profile corruption cases.

⁷⁷ The biggest observation efforts were conducted by the association Wake Up with 961 observers, *Roma for Democracy* with 162 observers, and *CIVIL – Center for Freedom* with 82 observers in the field.

additional protection for its election observers. In response to these concerns, the SEC appealed to all election officials to facilitate the access of observers to all stages of the electoral process, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) announced enhanced police presence in some areas on the 8 May election day.

Election Day

Election day was generally calm and peaceful.⁷⁸ Campaign silence regulations were mostly upheld, including across media platforms. The law is silent on the applicability of campaign silence regulations on social networks. The ODIHR EOM monitoring noted that several party leaders and candidates posted messages online urging citizens to cast their votes on election day, at times including campaign messages. The SEC announced the voter turnout for the parliamentary race at 55.36 percent and for the presidential run-off at 47.48 percent.⁷⁹

The IEOM assessed the opening of the polls positively at 70 of the 123 polling stations observed. Election board (EB) members were largely familiar with the procedures and maintained transparency. However, some procedures were not consistently followed: in 24 instances, opening protocols were not completed and signed before voting began; in 10 cases, ballot boxes were not properly sealed; and in 4 cases, the serial number of security seals was not recorded in the logbook. EB members also encountered difficulties in configuring the biometric voter identification devices (BVIDs) in 11 instances, although most polling stations opened with minimal delays of no more than 15 minutes.⁸⁰

The administration of the voting process was assessed positively by IEOM observers in 99 percent of the 1,340 polling stations observed. Contributing to the positive assessments was the implementation of important procedural safeguards, such as voter identification, stamping of ballot papers by EBs and signing of voter lists, at 99 per cent of the polling stations observed. However, the legal requirement for EBs to inform voters about voting procedures, important to reduce the number of invalid ballots, was not followed in approximately 41 percent of the polling stations.⁸¹ BVIDs were operational in nearly all instances, but in 24 percent of the observations not every voter could be successfully identified by fingerprint scanning. The secrecy of the vote was generally upheld although in a few reported cases (19 observations) the polling station layout compromised vote secrecy. Group or family voting was observed in 4 percent of the polling stations (39 instances). While not against the law, in 4 per cent (41 instances), persons other than EB members were observed to be tracking voters who had voted, which may be an indication of pressure on voters. In 18 instances, ballot boxes were not properly sealed.

Representatives from political parties or candidates were present in 86 percent of polling stations, contributing to transparency. Citizen or international observers were present in 7 percent of observations. In more than 99 per cent of the polling stations, all authorized persons present had a clear view of the process and almost all EBs fully co-operated with IEOM observers. Women constituted 49 percent of the EB members and accounted for 60 percent of polling station chairpersons. Some 46 percent of the observed polling stations did not provide for independent access for persons with physical

⁷⁸ On 8 May, isolated election-related incidents were reported by the prosecutor's office and the police, including attempted influence on voters in Negotino and Kochani that resulted in the opening of criminal proceedings, while allegations of vote buying were investigated in Ohrid, Kriva Palanka and Mavrovo i Rostushe, the latter case eventually closed as unsubstantiated.

⁷⁹ Based on preliminary turnout data by the SEC, the average turnout in municipalities with an ethnic Albanian majority (according to [census](#) data), was 45 percent for the parliamentary elections and 24 percent for the presidential elections. In the other municipalities combined, the turnout was 59 percent for the parliamentary elections and 58 percent for the presidential elections.

⁸⁰ The SEC announced that in three polling stations in the municipalities of Kochani, Kumanovo and Ohrid, technical issues with the biometric devices could not be solved, and the SEC authorized the EBs to continue the voter identification process without the BVIDs.

⁸¹ In the parliamentary elections, the overall number of invalid ballots remained comparable to the first presidential round, at 2.7 percent. However, for the presidential run-off, the rate of invalid votes increased to 5.6 percent.

disabilities, and the layout was unsuitable for such voters in 22 percent of stations. Almost all polling stations had a tactile ballot guide for voters with visual impairments.

IEOM assessed the counting process negatively in 16 of the 106 polling stations observed due to errors and omissions in the procedures. Observers attributed this to an insufficient understanding of procedures by EB members, as well as efforts to hasten the process. Procedural errors included not following the prescribed order of procedures in 53 cases, failing to count the number of voters who signed the voter list in 24 cases, and not invalidating unused ballot papers before opening ballot boxes in 28 cases. The transparency of the process was compromised in instances where those present did not have a clear view of the procedures in 10 cases, where EB chairpersons did not consistently display ballots during the count in 35 cases, or displayed them in such a way that the markings were not visible in 16 cases. IEOM observers reported from 26 counts that the EBs had difficulties in filling in the final protocols, and in 19 polling stations, the EB members pre-signed the results protocols before finishing the count. Further, in 14 instances, persons other than EB members were allowed to participate in the count.

Results tabulation was positively evaluated by IEOM observers as efficient and smooth in 64 of the 66 MECs observed. Still, despite additional training on the filling of results protocols before election day, numerous mistakes and discrepancies, primarily arithmetical errors requiring corrections before tabulation, were observed in 49 cases. IEOM observers noted that in 24 cases, the EBs completed the results protocols at MEC premises immediately before submitting them for tabulation. In 9 instances, inadequate MEC premises, mainly due to insufficient space to accommodate all EBs waiting for their materials to be processed, led to overcrowding and hampered transparency. The SEC published partial results from polling stations online on an ongoing basis and held two press conferences on election night to announce the preliminary results for the presidential run-off and parliamentary elections.

On election day, the SEC received some 490 complaints related to voter registration.⁸² Of these, 283 were fully resolved by the close of the polls: 199 were granted, 68 were rejected, and 16 were considered inadmissible; 195 complaints remained unresolved.⁸³ The SEC did not publish any of the decisions on the matters reviewed, impacting transparency. Overall, the handling of election-day related complaints did not ensure access to effective legal remedies.

***The English version of this report is the only official document.
An unofficial translation is available in Macedonian and Albanian.***

⁸² The majority of the complaints were filed in the municipalities of Chair, Gostivar, Kichevo, Lipkovo, Novo Selo, Strumica, Tetovo, Veles, and Zhelino.

⁸³ Of the 195 complaints that remained unresolved by the close of the polls, 92 were not examined, while 103 had been decided by the SEC, but the verification of the decision was not issued to the affected voters by the MECs.

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Skopje, 9 May 2024 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the European Parliament (EP). The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation.

Mr. Nikoloz Samkharadze was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. Ms. Carina Öderbrink headed the OSCE PA delegation, Mr. Alfred Heer headed the PACE delegation, and Mr. Leopoldo López Gil headed the EP delegation. Ambassador Jillian Stirk is the Head of the ODIHR EOM, deployed from 20 March.

Each of the institutions involved in this International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the electoral process. The OSCE PA will present its report at its annual Session in Bucharest in July. The PACE will present its report at its June 2024 part-session, in Strasbourg. The EP will present the report in the 10th term, which begins on 16 July 2024.

The ODIHR EOM includes 14 experts in the capital and 20 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 348 observers from 42 countries were deployed, including 20 long-term and 199 short-term observers deployed by ODIHR, as well as a 74-member delegation from the OSCE PA, a 25-member delegation from the PACE and 11-member delegation from the European Parliament. Opening was observed in 123 polling stations and voting was observed in 1,340 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 106 polling stations, and the tabulation in 66 MECs.

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

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