

## INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

### PRESS RELEASE

## Parliamentary elections largely met international standards, but tainted by isolated irregularities, say observers in Skopje

Skopje, 06.07.2006 - Parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 5 July largely met international standards for democratic elections, but violence and intimidation cast a shadow over the campaign, and election day, 5 July, was calm with isolated cases of serious irregularities, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a preliminary statement released today.

Some 380 observers monitored the election on behalf of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). This was the ninth time the OSCE observed elections in the country.

"There were a number of improvements in the election process which are a result of the implementation of previous recommendations," said Audrey Glover, Head of the ODIHR mission.

"However, serious incidents during the campaign and on election day are a continuing reminder that perpetrators must be held accountable in accordance with the rule of law."

Mevlut Cavusoglu, who led the PACE delegation, said: "Yesterday the citizens could, and did, decide on the political direction of their country in a generally democratic fashion. The serious, but isolated, irregularities observed should not be allowed to overshadow the democratic progress made. We regret that for some violence and manipulation are still acceptable tools to further their political goals. This can only be condemned. We welcome the willingness and capacity of the people and the electoral system to take corrective action towards such abuses, which is a sign of political maturity."

The observers also concluded that voting and counting were conducted in an orderly and peaceful manner in most of the country, but isolated, serious irregularities, such as vote buying, ballot box stuffing, tension and intimidation tainted the election process in a number of municipalities.

While observers did not find any deliberate attempt to manipulate polling station protocols during the count, major procedural problems were reported.

Following an inclusive registration of political parties, the campaign was competitive, offering the electorate a broad choice. However, a number of violent incidents cast a shadow over the first half of the campaign. Observers also noted instances of abuse of administrative resources, particularly by mayors' offices.

Overall, the broadcast and print media provided the voters with a variety of views, but the public broadcaster, Macedonian Television, favoured the ruling parties in its coverage. The tone of the media coverage was generally moderate, with some partisan comments in private media.

Although the new consolidated Election Code was finalized only three months before the elections, it provides a more consistent basis for their conduct, including provisions for increasing the participation of women and national minorities.

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