

Violence in parts of the country tarnishes parliamentary elections, observers in Skopje say

Strasbourg, 02.06.2008 – Key international standards were not met in yesterday's elections, as organised attempts to violently disrupt the electoral process in parts of the ethnic Albanian areas made it impossible for voters in many places to freely express their will, said the international election observation mission for the parliamentary elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in a statement released today.

The observers noted that while the elections were well administered procedurally, the law was only enforced selectively and the authorities failed to prevent violence and intimidation in ethnically Albanian areas. On election day, one person was killed and several injured. Voting and counting was marred by numerous serious irregularities, in particular in parts of the ethnic Albanian areas, including cases of intimidation, unrest, ballot box stuffing, and tampering with results. Few incidents and irregularities were reported in the rest of the country.

Political parties were permitted to campaign freely throughout most of the country, and voters were offered a variety of choices during a vigorously fought election campaign. However, the largest opposition party had its campaign manipulated through the activities of a party with similarly named candidates. The media generally enabled voters to make an informed choice, although public broadcasters showed bias in favour of the governing parties.

"Violence and attempts to manipulate the campaign sadly cast a shadow over otherwise well-run elections that gave most voters a real choice between an array of political forces. The violence we noted in ethnic Albanian areas is an unacceptable breach of peace and peoples' democratic rights," said OSCE PA Vice President Pia Christmas-Møller, Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observers.

"While technically the elections were well organised in the greater part of the country, it is most unfortunate that a sizable proportion of the electorate was deprived of the right to express its will in these elections due to the irresponsible, violent and destructive actions of activists of the two major Albanian parties. Such actions are not conducive to the democratic process and the integration of this country in European and transatlantic structures," said Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Head of the PACE delegation.

"We were concerned from the outset that these elections could be marred by violence in some areas. Unfortunately, the lack of response to the numerous violations reported during the campaign did little to prevent the serious incidents of violence that took place on election day. The OSCE will monitor whether the authorities seriously address the violations and take remedial steps, and we will observe reruns," said Ambassador Robert Barry, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term election observation mission.

The international election observation mission is a joint undertaking of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

Contact:

Vladimir Dronov, PACE, mobile: +33 663493792, vladimir.dronov@coe.int

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