



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

# REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

## PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 24 APRIL AND 8 MAY 2024

ODIHR Election Observation Mission  
Final Report



Warsaw  
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**REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA**  
**PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**  
**24 April and 8 May 2024**

**ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report<sup>1</sup>**

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following an invitation from the authorities of North Macedonia and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the 24 April presidential election, as well as the 8 May parliamentary elections and the concurrent second round of the presidential election. The ODIHR EOM assessed the compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and national legislation. For the 24 April election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), while for the 8 May election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by delegations from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, PACE, and the European Parliament (EP) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued on 25 April, the IEOM concluded that “[t]he first round of the presidential election was competitive, and voters had the opportunity to make informed choices. The legal framework provides the basis for democratic elections but it does not sufficiently regulate some important elements of a presidential contest, and recent changes were introduced through a process that lacked transparency and public consultation. [...] The linking of the allocation of campaign funds and media opportunities to party affiliation disproportionately favoured candidates associated with major political parties. Despite limited human and technical resources, the election administration generally enjoyed public confidence in its technical capacity and managed the process efficiently overall. Election day was assessed overall positively, with voting procedures largely respected, while in some cases, during the counting, election boards did not fully complete prescribed procedures”.

In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued on 9 May, the IEOM concluded that “[t]he parliamentary and presidential elections were competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected, although the process remains insufficiently regulated. [...] 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. [...] 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. [...] 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”.

Voters directly elect the president for a five-year term from a single nationwide constituency. Contrary to long-standing recommendations of ODIHR and the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission, the presidential run-off is only valid if there is a turnout of at least 40 percent. If this threshold is not met, the entire electoral process is repeated, risking cycles of repeated elections. The parliament’s 120 members are elected for a four-year term under a proportional representation system in six in-country

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<sup>1</sup> The English version of this report is the only official document. Unofficial translations are available in Macedonian and Albanian.

districts. Electoral constituency boundaries were not adjusted to address existing discrepancies in voting power, at odds with legal provisions.

The legal framework establishes the basis for holding democratic elections. However, certain provisions fall short of international standards and good practice, while some others are imprecise or deficient. Key aspects of the presidential election, such as campaign rules, media access, and the distribution of state funding, are not sufficiently regulated. These gaps resulted in authorities applying rules formulated for political parties to candidates in the presidential election, thereby advantaging those affiliated with major parliamentary parties. The Electoral Code was amended shortly before the elections through an expedited process without public consultation, contrary to international standards and OSCE commitments, and despite prior ODIHR criticisms about previous similar practices. Key recommendations from the inter-agency working group tasked with advancing electoral reform, as well as from ODIHR and the Venice Commission, remain unaddressed, including those to comprehensively revise the electoral legal framework, ensure equal access to media, and enhance the integrity of campaign financing.

The election administration managed the organizational aspects of the electoral preparations efficiently and met all legal deadlines. During the pre-electoral period, the State Election Commission (SEC) held regular sessions which were open to the public and were broadcast online. However, it did not consistently give public notice of its sessions, sometimes announcing them late, which decreased transparency. Many lower-level commissions had difficulty initiating their operations, due to significant turnover in membership, delays in new appointments, and disruptions in funding. While training for lower-level election bodies was generally comprehensive, the outreach and scope of the SEC's voter education campaign was limited. Notable steps were taken to improve the accessibility of the electoral process for persons with disabilities, but not all important voter information was available in accessible formats, and physical access to polling stations remained inadequate.

The final voter register included approximately 1.8 million voters. ODIHR EOM interlocutors did not raise concerns about the inclusiveness of the voter register. However, contrary to international standards, persons deprived of legal capacity do not have the right to vote, and recent legal amendments maintaining the registration of individuals without valid ID documents were not fully enforced due to unclear instructions. Moreover, the law does not allow for updating the voter register after 50 days from the announcement of the elections. This, combined with shortcomings in the residential address system and civil registration, as well as the fact that many citizens living abroad retain in-country residency status, potentially negatively impacted the quality of the data. Previous ODIHR recommendations to consistently update and audit the voter register were not implemented.

Although the Constitution and statutory legislation provide for gender equality, women remain underrepresented in various elected and appointed positions. Women comprised 43 percent of parliamentary candidates, and two presidential candidates, including the eventual winner of the election, were women. However, few women were featured as speakers at campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM, and gender equality issues were largely absent from campaign discourse. The law mandates at least 40 percent representation of either gender in parliamentary candidate lists. While all registered lists met this requirement, women were often placed in the lowest positions allowed by the law, resulting in a significant decrease in the percentage of women in the parliament following the elections compared to its previous composition.

The campaign was competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected. However, the regulation of access to campaign spaces, media, and campaign funding favoured the four main parliamentary parties, hindering other contestants' ability to campaign on an equal footing. Key campaign themes included the economy, anti-corruption efforts, accession to the European Union, and a potential constitutional reform. The tone of campaigning became progressively negative ahead of the first round of the

presidential election and remained so in both the parliamentary and presidential campaigns. Several local public infrastructure projects were announced or inaugurated by mayors, government officials, and candidates from various political parties, blurring the line between state functions and political activities. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) is responsible for overseeing compliance with the provisions on misuse of state resources, but most potential infringements remained unaddressed, highlighting a gap in effective enforcement.

While nearly half of the population regularly uses social networking platforms, there are no legal provisions or authorities regulating the digital campaign environment. The ODIHR EOM social network monitoring observed an active online campaign, with political parties, their leaders, and presidential candidates engaging audiences primarily by referencing traditional campaign events. Party leaders and candidates had the most significant impact on the online environment, shaping rhetoric that became increasingly adversarial following the official start of the parliamentary campaign.

The minimal campaign finance reporting requirements, along with deficiencies and inconsistencies in the legal framework and the limited resources and capacities of oversight bodies, significantly diminished transparency and accountability. The requirements for interim reports did not include detailed information on contributions or reporting on expenditures, limiting transparency. Only 10 of the 17 parliamentary contestants submitted interim campaign finance reports in a timely manner and in the required format; contrary to the law, the oversight body, the SCPC, did not take any action for non-compliance. The SCPC initiated some 45 misdemeanour cases following the announcement of the elections, but due to financial constraints and the late hiring of analysts, it did not deploy field monitors or inspect contestants' bank accounts, impacting the effectiveness of its oversight.

The media environment is diverse and generally free. However, political fragmentation, ethnic divisions, and intense competition within a constrained market resulted in less analytical and objective journalism. The current system of state funding for campaign advertising increases media dependence on state subsidies and does not prevent abuse by online news portals established only during the campaign and serving to channel state funds to parties. Coverage of the campaign was extensive, and televised debates contributed to the ability of voters to make an informed choice. The ODIHR EOM media monitoring found that the public broadcaster adhered to the formula for allocating time to political parties in elections, but some private channels favoured specific candidate lists.

The application of the regulations for election dispute resolution is limited by legislative ambiguities, conflicting deadlines, and parallel submission avenues. The SEC's handling of complaints did not ensure effective legal remedies: decisions available for ODIHR EOM review were often deficient or lacked justification, and complaints related to voter registration submitted on election days were not always resolved by the close of the polls. The Administrative Court met the short legal deadlines for reviewing appeals and ensured public access to most election-related hearings, but did not publish all of its decisions on voter registration and did not hear these cases in public sessions. Many IEOM interlocutors expressed little trust in the adjudication of election-related complaints, citing inefficiency of the judiciary and election administration and the potential for political pressure.

The 24 April presidential election day was peaceful overall, with campaign silence regulations largely respected. IEOM observers positively assessed the voting process in most polling stations, noting that Election Boards (EBs) followed the procedures as prescribed, and largely maintained vote secrecy. However, instances of group and family voting were observed, which often negatively impacts women's participation, as well as the tracking of voters, potentially indicating political pressure. The vote count was assessed negatively in 9 of the 90 observed polling stations due to procedural errors or omissions. As no presidential candidate received more than half of the vote, a presidential run-off between the two leading candidates was scheduled concurrently with the parliamentary elections.

The 8 May election day was generally calm and peaceful. The IEOM's assessment found that voting procedures were implemented in line with legal provisions. However, the IEOM observed an increased number of instances of group and family voting, as well as tracking of voters, compared to the first election day. The legal requirement to inform voters about procedures was not followed in almost half of the polling stations. The counting process was negatively assessed in 16 of the 106 observed polling stations, due to procedural errors. Tabulation was efficient, but limited space and overcrowding limited visibility for observers, and mistakes or discrepancies in polling station results protocols were noted in the majority of observations.

The SEC received 26 complaints contesting the parliamentary results in 137 polling stations and the overall results in 2 electoral districts. The SEC upheld six complaints, invalidating results in seven polling stations. These decisions were confirmed on appeals by the Administrative Court. Upon a SEC decision, voting was repeated at seven polling stations on 22 May. After resolving an additional complaint challenging the result of the rerun at one polling station, the electoral results were finalized on 30 May. The voter turnout was reported as 47.47 percent in the presidential election and 55.44 percent in the parliamentary elections.

This report offers a number of recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in the Republic of North Macedonia closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations include reviewing the Electoral Code to eliminate gaps and inconsistencies, ensuring adequate budget allocations for election commissions, monitoring and investigating electoral violations, enhancing women's participation in politics, revising the system of electoral campaign funding, eliminating restrictions on electoral complaints, and addressing procedural inconsistencies in the determination of polling station results. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports, including through a comprehensive review of the electoral legislation.

## **II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Following an invitation from the authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia to observe the 24 April 2024 presidential election and the 8 May parliamentary elections, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 19 March. The mission, led by Ambassador Jillian Stirk, consisted of a 14-member core team based in Skopje and 20 long-term observers (LTOs) deployed on 27 March to 9 locations around the country. The ODIHR EOM members remained in the country until 19 May to follow post-electoral developments.

For the 24 April presidential election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM). Alfred Heer headed the PACE delegation. The IEOM deployed 234 observers from 33 OSCE participating States, including 197 long-term and short-term observers by ODIHR, as well as an 18-member PACE delegation. Opening was observed in 93 polling stations and voting was observed in 925 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 90 polling stations, and the tabulation in 75 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs).

For the 8 May parliamentary and presidential run-off election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by delegations from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), PACE, and the European Parliament (EP). Nikoloz Samkharadze was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. Alfred Heer headed the PACE delegation, Carina Öderbrink headed the OSCE PA delegation, and Leopoldo López Gil headed the EP delegation. The IEOM deployed 348 observers from 42 OSCE participating States, including 219 ODIHR long-term

and short-term observers, a 74-member OSCE PA delegation, a 25-member PACE delegation, and an 11-member delegation from the EP. 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. Overall, 44 per cent of the IEOM observers deployed for both election days were women. All institutions composing the IEOM have endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

The ODIHR EOM assessed compliance of the election processes with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and domestic legislation. This final report follows two Statements of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions that were released at press conferences on 25 April and 9 May, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

The ODIHR EOM wishes to thank the authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia for their invitation to observe the elections, and the State Election Commission (SEC) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their assistance. It also expresses appreciation to other state institutions, the judiciary, political parties, media, civil society organizations, international community representatives, and other interlocutors for their co-operation and for sharing their views.

### III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

North Macedonia is a parliamentary republic where legislative power is vested in the unicameral parliament. Executive authority is held by a government led by the prime minister, while the president serves as head of state and has limited executive powers. On 14 February 2024, in accordance with the Constitution, the speaker of the parliament announced that the regularly scheduled parliamentary elections would be held on 8 May. The presidential election was scheduled for 24 April, with a potential second round to take place on 8 May, concurrently with the parliamentary elections.<sup>3</sup>

The elections took place in a generally stable and calm political environment. However, in the years prior to the elections, entrenched political fragmentation and ethnic divisions hindered long-awaited reforms of the election legislation, public administration and the judiciary, and the implementation of anti-corruption efforts, also required by the European Union (EU) as part of the accession negotiations. Most ODIHR EOM 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.<sup>4</sup>

Since independence in 1991, alternating governing coalitions have been led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE).<sup>5</sup> The previous presidential election, held on 21 April 2019 with a run-off on 5 May, was won by Stevo Pendarovski, who was endorsed by SDSM. The most recent parliamentary elections, held on 15 July 2020, resulted in a coalition government led

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<sup>2</sup> See previous ODIHR election reports on [North Macedonia](#).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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”.

<sup>5</sup> SDSM and Besa jointly secured 46 seats, BDI/DUI won 15 seats, the Alliance for Albanians and AlternAtivA coalition obtained 12 seats, VMRO-DPMNE won 44 seats, *the Left* (Levica) gained 2 seats, and the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH/DPA) secured 1 seat. This was the first time since 2006 that a parliament has completed its full term.

by SDSM and the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI/DUI).<sup>6</sup> In January 2024, in accordance with the law and the coalition agreement between the ruling parties, a caretaker government led by Talat Xhaferi, the country's first ethnic-Albanian prime minister, was established to organize the elections.<sup>7</sup>

The Constitution provides for gender equality, and the 2012 Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men requires equal gender representation at all levels of public administration and public life. However, underrepresentation of women persists in various elected and appointed positions. The outgoing parliament included 51 women among its 120 members (42.5 per cent); women held 4 of the 20 ministerial positions (20 per cent) in the outgoing government, and 2 of the 80 municipal mayors (2.5 per cent) are women. Six of the 62 political parties (10 per cent) that participated in the parliamentary race individually or as part of coalitions had women leaders. Several women politicians reported to the ODIHR EOM that they had experienced gender-based discrimination, unequal treatment in politics, and targeted online attacks due to their gender at various points in their political tenure.<sup>8</sup>

An equitable representation of ethnic communities in public life is mandated by the Constitution, and their cultural, linguistic, and religious identities are protected by legislation. The ethnic Albanian community is well-represented in public bodies through its political parties, including in government. However, other ethnic communities, such as the Roma and Turks, remain underrepresented in various aspects of public life.<sup>9</sup>

## IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Elections are regulated by the 1991 Constitution, the 2006 Electoral Code, the 2004 Law on the Financing of Political Parties, the 2019 Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflicts of Interest, the 1996 Criminal Code, and subsidiary acts by the State Election Commission (SEC).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In the pre-electoral period, other prominent parties and coalitions included the ethnic-Albanian VLEN/VREDI coalition, the political party Levica, the Party of Justice (GROM)-led coalition "Bravely for Macedonia", and the Movement ZNAM "For Our Macedonia". These groups participated in the parliamentary elections and endorsed presidential candidates.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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". See also the [2020 Assessment of the National Democratic Institute and the Ohrid Institute for Economic Strategies and International Affairs](#), which found that violence against women in politics peaks during election periods.

<sup>9</sup> 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, and Roma at 2.53 per cent. See section 136 of the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities [2022 Fifth Opinion on North Macedonia](#), which states that "the socio-economic situation of Roma continues to be significantly worse than that of the population in general". According to the [Minority Rights Group](#), "Turks do not participate effectively in public life, and [...] remain under-represented in public-sector employment".

<sup>10</sup> 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, and the 2020 Law on Personal Data Protection. North Macedonia ratified key international and regional human rights instruments related to the holding of democratic elections, including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#)), the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)), the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([CRPD](#)), the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ([CERD](#)) and the 2003 UN Convention against Corruption ([UNCAC](#)).



The legal framework establishes the basis for holding democratic elections. However, certain rules related to voter and candidate registration and election dispute resolution fall short of international standards and good practice. Additionally, aspects such as candidate registration, election dispute resolution, and campaign finance are underregulated or deficient.<sup>11</sup> Key aspects of the presidential election, including some campaign rules, access to the media, and the distribution of state funding, are not regulated. Gaps in these areas resulted in authorities applying rules formulated for the regulation of political parties, which factor their representation in parliament, to presidential elections, thereby advantaging candidates affiliated with the main parliamentary parties (also see *Campaign, Campaign Finance and Media*).<sup>12</sup>

The Electoral Code was amended on 7 March and 1 April 2024, after the elections had been announced, undermining legal certainty.<sup>13</sup> The changes, resulting from negotiations between the ruling parties and the opposition, were adopted through an expedited process without public debate, contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards.<sup>14</sup> The amendments, *inter alia*, changed the formula for determining the number of support signatures required to register as candidates for the parliamentary elections, revised certain campaign finance regulations, specified deadlines for resolving election disputes, and eliminated the requirement for citizens to possess a valid identification document to retain their inclusion in the voter register. The changes incorporated some previous ODIHR recommendations and technical proposals from the SEC. However, they largely disregarded recommendations made in November 2023 by the inter-agency working group which had been driving electoral reform discussions since May of that year. Moreover, the amendments left a number of previous ODIHR recommendations unaddressed, including those related to eliminating gaps and inconsistencies in the legislation, ensuring equal access to campaign resources, increasing the accountability and integrity of campaign financing, and enhancing regulations on the misuse of administrative resources.

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<sup>11</sup> Aspects falling short of international standards include the voting rights of persons with disabilities, restrictions on candidacy based on criminal charges, and the limitation of voters' legal standing for complaints to their individual rights. Areas falling short of international good practice include the deadlines for dispute resolution and the requirement to disclose ethnic affiliation in order to register as a parliamentary candidate. Underregulated aspects include candidate withdrawal after registration, and dispute resolution competencies among election management bodies.

<sup>12</sup> The law does not allow the nomination of presidential candidates by political parties but prescribes independent registration with support from voters or members of parliament (MPs). Campaign rules designate political parties as recipients and managers of resources. The rules on the distribution of state funding to political parties, based on their representation in parliament, benefit the major governing and opposition parties. The legal interpretation by authorities, including the SEC and the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AAVMS), required contractual agreements between presidential candidates and political parties to regulate access to budget funds for campaigns, campaign space, and other resources, even though such arrangements are not foreseen by law.

<sup>13</sup> 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 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".

<sup>14</sup> 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 (CCPR) [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".

Many ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns about a persistent lack of will across the political spectrum to address key problematic aspects of the electoral process through legal reforms and a repeated practice of amending the legal framework immediately before elections.<sup>15</sup>

*The Electoral Code should be comprehensively reviewed in order to eliminate inconsistencies, harmonize it with other relevant legislation, and to bring it in line with OSCE commitments, international obligations and good practice. Comprehensive rules for campaigning, including access to the media and campaign finance in presidential elections, should be established to ensure equitable opportunities for both presidential and parliamentary candidates. Any such legislative reform should be public, inclusive, and carried out sufficiently in advance of the next election.*

## **B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

The president is directly elected for a five-year term from a single nationwide constituency. If no candidate receives more than half the votes of all registered voters, a second round is held two weeks later between the top two candidates. The candidate that receives the highest number of votes in the run-off is elected, provided at least 40 per cent of registered voters participate in the election. If this turnout is not achieved, the entire election process must be repeated without a legally determined deadline. This turnout requirement is contrary to long-standing ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations and could lead to cycles of repeated elections, a risk increased by the high number of citizens living abroad who remain registered on in-country voter lists (see *Voter Registration*).<sup>16</sup>

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 six in-country districts. Seats are distributed under the *d'Hondt* formula. Up to three MPs can be elected from a single out-of-country electoral district. The number of seats representing voters abroad depends on a threshold calculated based on the previous election results, with no correlation to voter turnout, which is not in line with the principle of equality of the vote.<sup>17</sup>

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 per cent. However, the legislation does not establish procedures for determining and eliminating disparities that surpass this threshold. Changes to district boundaries can only be made through amendments to the Electoral Code. This leaves constituency boundary delimitation within the remit of the parliament, which does not sufficiently

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<sup>15</sup> The election-related legal framework was amended only a few weeks before the scheduled elections on 16 February 2020, and again on 2 April and 16 September 2021. While recent government programmes made general declarations of commitment to electoral reform, the draft legislative proposal planned for 2024 was not released.

<sup>16</sup> See the 2011 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Draft Joint Opinion on the Revised Electoral Code](#), which states that “if a voter turnout threshold is considered beneficial to the credibility of the electoral process, it is recommended for the first round only”.

<sup>17</sup> A candidate is elected if the list receives at least the same number of votes won by the MP with the lowest tally in an in-country seat for the most recent previous elections the minimal cost of an in-country mandate in the previous elections. 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”. Paragraph 20 of the 2016 ODIHR and Council of Europe’s Venice Commission [Joint Opinion on the Electoral Code](#), 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”.

safeguard the process from political influence.<sup>18</sup> Prior to these elections, the number of registered voters exceeded the legal threshold in three districts, but the boundaries were not adjusted, contrary to the law and international good practice.<sup>19</sup>

*To guarantee the equality of the vote, the legislation should prescribe a clear and consistent methodology and rules for a periodic review of district boundaries by an independent body. The delineation of district boundaries should be conducted in a timely, transparent, impartial, and inclusive manner, well before the next election.*

## V. 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. Early voting for homebound voters, as well as those in penal institutions and institutional care facilities, took place on 23 April and 7 May.

The SEC, composed of seven members nominated by political parties and appointed by the parliament for five years, holds regulatory, monitoring, and oversight powers.<sup>20</sup> For administrative and organizational matters, the commission is assisted by a professional service, which ought to be headed by a secretary general; however, the position has been vacant since 2021. Only two of the seven SEC members are women (29 per cent), which falls short of the required quota.<sup>21</sup>

The SEC held regular public sessions that were also broadcast online. Contrary to its Rules of Procedure, sessions were sometimes announced without a public notice or less than an hour in advance.<sup>22</sup> While the SEC adopted most technical decisions collegially, during the discussions on certain key issues, including post-electoral complaints, political considerations might have influenced the decision-making process (see *Post-Electoral Developments*). Additionally, contrary to legal requirements, not all session minutes and decisions were published online, limiting transparency. The SEC issued instructions and decisions to provide a framework for issues that were either insufficiently or not regulated by law. Many ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including some MEC members, noted that the SEC adopted some instructions and decisions late, and that the guidance on election-day procedures and dispute resolution was inadequate.

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<sup>18</sup> Electoral District (ED) boundaries were amended in 2020 following alleged political lobbying, when an ethnic-Albanian political party initiated the revision of boundaries in electoral district no. 5 and 6. However, the boundaries of other electoral districts remained unchanged despite existing disparities. See paragraph 20 of the 2017 Venice Commission [Report on Constituency Delineation and Seat Allocation](#), which states that “national legal frameworks for boundary delimitation are expected to provide that the persons or institutions responsible for drawing the electoral boundaries are independent and impartial”

<sup>19</sup> There was a 6.5 per cent surplus in ED no. 2, while ED no. 3 and 4 were below the threshold by 9.1 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. See also I.2.2 vii. of the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) and paragraphs 6, 7, and 19-23 of the 2017 Venice Commission [Report on Constituency Delineation and Seat Allocation](#).

<sup>20</sup> Opposition parties may nominate the SEC chairperson and two members, while the ruling parties may nominate the deputy chairperson and three members. The current SEC tenure began in January 2021. Between February 2023 and February 2024, the SEC had only six members due to disagreements between ethnic Albanian parliamentary parties over the implementation of legal provisions entitling opposition parties to appoint members. The appointment was finalized after one nominee withdrew following the nomination deadline.

<sup>21</sup> By law, each gender must comprise at least 30 percent of the membership of all election bodies.

<sup>22</sup> The SEC Rules of Procedure require at least two days’ notice for convening sessions, with the notice and proposed agenda published on the SEC website. Sessions can only be convened with shorter notice in urgent cases. During a session, the SEC chairperson argued that, upon established arrangement, all sessions in the electoral period are urgent.

MECs, responsible for administering elections in their respective municipalities, are comprised of five members randomly selected from civil service employees for five-year terms. EBs, which conduct polls at polling stations, have three permanent members appointed for four years from civil and public service employees, along with two temporary members nominated by political parties.<sup>23</sup> Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted that the composition of MECs and EBs from state and local administration staff increases political influence. Many MECs and EBs faced operational challenges caused by significant turnover in their membership, with many resignations occurring after completion of the training.<sup>24</sup> New appointments were often delayed because of a limited pool of suitable candidates, strict gender, ethnic, and residence criteria, outdated records of civil and public servants, and numerous exemption requests from selected members. All MECs met the legal criteria for ethnic representation, and most met the criteria for gender representation.<sup>25</sup>

*To enhance the effectiveness of appointing Municipal Election Commissions and electoral boards, consideration should be given to updating and revising the database of civil and public servants and broadening the eligibility criteria to expand the pool of suitable appointees. To ensure the stability of these bodies, the legislation should establish a reasonable deadline for changes in their composition prior to election day.*

Overall, the election administration managed the organizational and technical aspects of the electoral preparations efficiently and met all legal deadlines. However, persistent staff shortages in various SEC departments, the still unfilled role of the SEC secretary general, and reduced funding delayed several elements of the preparations, including 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.<sup>26</sup> Despite a previous ODIHR recommendation, MECs did not always have sufficient financial resources and occasionally received funds late, sometimes prompting personnel to use their personal equipment and finances for official purposes.

*To ensure the operational efficiency of the State Election Commission and the Municipal Election Commissions, the authorities should provide adequate, effective, and timely budget allocations to these bodies, including in non-election years when needed, to ensure adequate conditions for hiring sufficient qualified staff.*

The SEC developed and implemented a comprehensive training programme for lower-level election bodies, media representatives, political parties, and CSOs. Mandatory courses for EB members, including those nominated by political parties, started well ahead of the elections, but in some areas very few EB members attended. Most training sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM were well-organized, interactive, and effectively covered essential parts of the election-day procedures. Following the presidential election day, refresher training sessions for EB chairpersons and their substitutes

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<sup>23</sup> MEC and non-partisan EB members were appointed in 2021. All MEC and EB members have substitutes.

<sup>24</sup> Commonly cited reasons for resignations included personal issues such as retirement and poor health, as well as perceived political pressure. After the announcement of the elections, some 25 per cent of MEC and 14 per cent of permanent EB members were replaced. In five municipalities, the turnover of EB membership was around 50 per cent, with many replacements occurring after the completion of the training. Some MECs did not manage to reach *quorum*, preventing them from convening sessions or making decisions. In some cases, when chairpersons were absent, MECs could not access financial resources, as these are deposited to chairpersons' personal accounts.

<sup>25</sup> In municipalities where ethnic minorities make up at least 20 per cent of the population, these groups must be equitably represented. Out of 80 MECs, 4 did not comply with the gender representation requirement. In total, some 49 per cent of the MEC members were women.

<sup>26</sup> Shortcomings were most notable in the IT, budget, and legal departments. The SEC attributed 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. The 2024 electoral budget was cut to 80 per cent, with some 60 per cent of the expenses allocated for reimbursement of paid political advertisements.

incorporated discussions on lessons learned. However, key topics such as new regulations for voter registration and identification, the use of biometric voter identification devices, measures against group and family voting, and election-day dispute resolution were not uniformly addressed.

Due to administrative challenges in the procurement process and delayed approval of educational materials by the commission, the SEC launched a voter education campaign ten days before the presidential election day, two weeks behind schedule. The campaign, using leaflets, broadcast media, and online platforms, mostly featured general messages encouraging voter participation. After the 24 April presidential election day, additional video spots were introduced, explaining voting processes for the concurrent elections, ballot validity, and prohibited activities during voting. The educational materials were mainly in Macedonian, with subtitles in Albanian and occasionally in the Romani, Serbian, Turkish, and Vlach languages.

Positively, the SEC made voter information materials available in various accessible formats for persons with sensory disabilities, published polling station accessibility data online, established a helpline for voters with hearing impairments, and provided some assistive tools, such as tactile ballot templates, for election day. Some SEC press conferences and sessions were interpreted into sign language. However, EBs were not adequately trained on how to use these assistive tools, and access to key information in accessible formats, including voter registration data, was insufficient. IEOM observations on election day confirmed long-standing deficiencies in the physical accessibility of polling stations for voters with limited mobility.

*All relevant actors should coordinate to ensure the independent participation of persons with various types of disabilities in the entire electoral process, in line with international standards and good practice, ensuring that the premises and layout of polling stations are independently accessible and that information about the electoral process and contestants is available in accessible formats.*

## VI. 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.<sup>27</sup>

Voters residing in-country are automatically included in the permanent voter register, based on data from the civil and population registers. The Electoral Code assigns the SEC the responsibility for maintaining the voter register; however, in practice, the State Statistical Office continued to administer most voter registration data. Citizens temporarily residing abroad may actively register to vote at diplomatic representations or may vote in the country according to their last place of residence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Although the Electoral Code allows for retaining voting rights for individuals with partially removed legal capacity, the Constitution retains a blanket restriction on voting rights for persons deprived of legal capacity, and there are no subsidiary regulations to support the Electoral Code's respective provisions. This prevents the implementation of individualized assessments regarding citizens' voting rights. See Article 29 of the [2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD), which requires States to "guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others" and 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".

<sup>28</sup> 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. In total, 2,569 voters abroad were able to vote in the presidential election.

In line with a previous ODIHR recommendation, and amid delays in issuing new identity documents following the invalidation of documents bearing the country's previous constitutional name, the March 2024 legal amendments removed the requirement that voters have a valid identification document in order to be placed or maintained on the voter register. However, this change was not fully put into effect before the elections, which the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) attributed to a lack of clear provisions in the legislation on how to update registration data from voters without valid documents.<sup>29</sup> As a result, a number of otherwise eligible voters were still not included in the voter register.<sup>30</sup> Since IDs are still necessary to vote, as a temporary measure introduced by the March 2024 legal amendments to mitigate delays in issuing new ID documents, voters with IDs that expired within nine months prior to the elections were allowed to use them for identification at the polling station.<sup>31</sup>

Voters can verify the accuracy of their registration data throughout the year, and request corrections at any point up to 50 days following the announcement of the elections. Voter lists were available for public scrutiny at SEC regional offices from 28 February to 18 March.<sup>32</sup> Changes to address, name, or citizenship status made after 2 April were not reflected in the voter lists, which reduced the accuracy and inclusiveness of the data.<sup>33</sup> There are no legal requirements to update the voter lists before presidential run-offs. Citizens who turned 18 between the two rounds were added to the voter lists for the parliamentary elections, but not for the second-round presidential election.<sup>34</sup> According to the SEC, such citizens could be added manually to voter lists on election day on the basis of an admitted complaint.

*To guarantee that all eligible citizens can effectively exercise their right to vote, authorities should take appropriate measures to ensure that all voters, including those without valid identification documents, are effectively included in the voter register. The Electoral Code should be amended to provide for updates to the voter register between the two rounds of the presidential election.*

For the presidential election, the voter register listed 1,814,317 voters, among them 95,116 registered abroad, while for the parliamentary elections, the register comprised 1,815,350 voters, with 96,010 abroad. ODIHR EOM interlocutors did not raise concerns about the inclusiveness of the voter register. However, some pointed to the significant number of citizens who remain on the register because they maintain official residence in-country despite effectively living abroad.<sup>35</sup> This affects thresholds for important processes, which are based on voter registration data, including parliamentary constituency

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<sup>29</sup> The MoIA informed the ODIHR EOM that the registration data extracted from their database generally corresponded to data included in valid identification documents, providing a definite set of data to prove voters' eligibility.

<sup>30</sup> For these elections, only about 88,000 voters with IDs expired within the nine months prior to the elections were additionally included in the voter register, out of a total of up to 200,000 citizens with expired IDs.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> According to the SEC, 6,231 voters visited the SEC regional offices and 56,299 verified their data online. Following the public scrutiny, the SEC received 143 requests from voters and 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. Pursuant to the March 2024 legal amendments, with an aim to enhance personal data protection, the SEC limited the scope of information shared with political parties to include only data indispensable for scrutiny, such as voters' names, dates of birth and addresses.

<sup>33</sup> Voter identification procedures allow such voters to vote if they provide sufficient evidence to verify their identity.

<sup>34</sup> According to the MoIA, this affected 1,148 citizens who turned 18 between the two rounds. Paragraph 11 of the [1996 UN Human Rights Committee \(CCPR\) General Comment on Article 25 of the ICCPR](#) requires states to take "effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right".

<sup>35</sup> Based on data from Eurostat and the 2021 population census, a [December 2023 International Monetary Fund \(IMF\) working paper](#) concludes that at least 200,000 people, or close to 10 percent of the population, have emigrated. The MoIA informed the ODIHR EOM that the enforcement of provisions requiring individuals to declare address changes, including when moving abroad, is inconsistent.

delineation, signature collection in support of independent candidates, and turnout in presidential run-offs, particularly as these citizens do not participate in the elections in large numbers. Moreover, persistent shortcomings in the residential address system and deficiencies in civil registration continue to diminish the accuracy of the voter register.<sup>36</sup>

*To enhance the accuracy of the voter register, adequate mechanisms for updating, harmonizing and cleaning the relevant state databases that serve as the basis for the register should be established. The authorities should facilitate the conduct of meaningful audits of the voter register and other pertinent databases.*

## VII. CANDIDATE RIGHTS AND REGISTRATION

Citizens who are registered voters over the age of 40 by election day and have been resident in the country for at least 10 of the last 15 years may stand for president. The residency requirement appears to be overly restrictive, at odds with the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and other international standards.<sup>37</sup> 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 an individualized assessment of the case, which does not fully meet the principle of proportionality enshrined in international standards and OSCE commitments.<sup>38</sup>

The nomination of a presidential candidate must be supported either by the signatures of 30 MPs or at least 10,000 voters. Parliamentary candidates may be nominated by political parties or electoral coalitions formed before elections, or may stand independently, supported by a group of voters. Non-partisan parliamentary candidate lists needed to be supported by the signatures of at least 1,000 voters.<sup>39</sup> Signatures had to be collected at the premises of 34 SEC regional offices or designated notaries between 28 February and 8 March. Some contestants reported that voters residing in rural areas faced difficulties reaching the SEC regional offices, which made it difficult for them to collect signatures.<sup>40</sup> In line with the law, voters are permitted to sign in support of more than one contestant.

The law mandates a minimum representation of 40 per cent of either gender on every parliamentary 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

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<sup>36</sup> 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 inconsistently executed. Due to unreliable data, the civil registers include records of voters with unrealistically high ages and registered at non-existent addresses. The SEC informed the ODIHR EOM that voter assignment per polling station is at times hindered by a lack of standardized address format and inconsistencies in citizens' address records across various state databases.

<sup>37</sup> Paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that the participating States should "respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination". See also paragraph 15 of the [1996 UN CCPR General Comment no. 25](#): "persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation".

<sup>38</sup> 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 [UN CCPR General Comment no. 25](#).

<sup>39</sup> The March 2024 amendments to the Electoral Code changed the signature requirement from a fixed number per district to one per cent of voters registered in the respective electoral district; however, this provision was not applicable for these elections, since it entered into effect after the end of signature collection period.

<sup>40</sup> While SEC offices certify signatures for free, notaries may charge a fee to list submitters for their services. Only six contestants of the presidential race opted for using the service of notaries in signature collection.

disclose their ethnic identity in order to register.<sup>41</sup> Lists are required to have an equal number of candidates to the number of seats in the district, which may hinder the participation of smaller and newly established parties and independent candidates.<sup>42</sup>

*To further promote pluralism in candidate registration, the electoral legislation should be revised in order to provide the possibility for individual candidacies.*

*The requirement for prospective candidates to disclose their ethnic identity should be reconsidered.*

Candidate nomination for the presidential election ended on 19 March and on 2 April for the parliamentary elections. The SEC verified the registration documents for the established criteria and contestants were given 48 hours to address any identified omissions or shortcomings.<sup>43</sup> The SEC met all legal deadlines for candidate registration, although it reported difficulties in doing so for the parliamentary contest due to delays receiving candidates' personal and criminal record data from other state authorities.

Candidate registration was inclusive. The SEC registered seven presidential candidates, including two women. Two candidates were ethnic Albanians.<sup>44</sup> The parliamentary elections were contested by 1,680 candidates nominated by 12 political parties and 5 coalitions. The SEC rejected the registration of nine parliamentary candidate lists for failing to comply with the legal requirements.<sup>45</sup> Of all registered candidates, 14 per cent fell within the age range of 18 to 29 years. Women comprised 43 per cent of parliamentary candidates but headed only 21 of the 84 lists (25 per cent). Women candidates were often placed in the lowest positions allowed by law, leading to a significant decrease in the number of elected women MPs following the elections (see *Post-electoral Developments*).<sup>46</sup>

Six presidential candidates were supported by groups of voters and one by members of parliament. According to the law, candidates supported by voters are officially independent. However, in practice, all presidential candidates were endorsed by political parties, most used party symbols on the ballot and,

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<sup>41</sup> See Article 64 para 2 of the Electoral Code. Section I.2.4.c of the 2002 Venice Commission's [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states that such declarations should not be compulsory. See also the [2013](#) and [2016](#) ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Opinions on the Electoral Code.

<sup>42</sup> Paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to "respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination".

<sup>43</sup> For the presidential election, two nominating entities had to provide additional documentation, including tax numbers and campaign bank account details. In the parliamentary elections, various submitters needed to address issues such as non-compliance with gender quotas, missing criminal record certificates, lack of declaration of ethnic identity, insufficient numbers of candidates, and replacement of non-eligible candidates.

<sup>44</sup> The registered presidential candidates were Stevo Pendarovski, endorsed by SDSM-led coalition (Coalition for a European Future); Gordana Siljanovska Davkova endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition (Your Macedonia Coalition); Stevco Jakimovski endorsed by GROM-led coalition (Coalition Brave for Macedonia); Bujar Osmani, endorsed by the BDI/DUI-led coalition (European Front); Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska endorsed by the Left; Arben Taravari, endorsed by VLEN/VREDI coalition; Maksim Dimitrievski, endorsed by I KNOW – Movement for Our Macedonia (ZNAM).

<sup>45</sup> Two cases were rejected because they were submitted late, the other seven cases were due to non-compliance with the gender quota, the requisite number of candidates, or for missing requisite registration documents. Three political parties appealed the rejections to the Administrative Court, which upheld the SEC decisions.

<sup>46</sup> Women were placed first on 25 percent of candidate lists, second on 27 percent, and third on 57 percent. 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*, the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, and ZNAM had one each. The BDI/DUI-led coalition, *Motherland Macedonia* and the VLEN/VREDI coalitions had no women leading their lists.



following their registration, were subjected by the SEC and other authorities to the same regulations that apply to political parties.<sup>47</sup>

## VIII. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

### A. CAMPAIGN REGULATIONS

The official campaign periods begin 20 days before the respective elections and last until 24 hours before election day.<sup>48</sup> As previously highlighted by an unimplemented ODIHR recommendation, the Electoral Code restricts certain forms of political activities before the campaign period begins.<sup>49</sup> While the March 2024 legal amendments allow contestants to hold one event between the registration of candidates and the official start of the campaign, the law does not elaborate on the nature or format that such an event might take. The ODIHR EOM observed that some presidential candidates and their endorsing political parties held multiple events featuring political messages during this period, potentially contravening legal provisions.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the legal framework lacks provisions explaining how to apply campaign regulations when presidential and parliamentary elections are held concurrently, which resulted in parliamentary candidates campaigning during the presidential campaign period.

The Electoral Code provides for equal access by all electoral contestants to all forms of electoral campaigning, but in effect 90 per cent of the budgetary funds for campaigning, including airtime, billboards, and poster space, must be apportioned equally between the four main ruling and opposition parties. As campaign rules for presidential candidates are not specifically regulated, authorities applied rules formulated for political parties, which factor their representation in parliament. This allocation of resources impacted the ability of all contestants to campaign equally (see also *Legal Framework, Campaign Finance* and *Media* sections).<sup>51</sup>

To prevent the misuse of administrative resources, the Electoral Code prohibits the launch of public development projects, extraordinary budgetary disbursements, and budget-funded employment procedures after the elections are called. It is forbidden to launch public projects from 20 days before the campaign period begins. The ODIHR EOM observed that, at odds with these provisions, several local public infrastructure projects were announced or inaugurated by mayors, government officials, and MP candidates from various political parties, in some instances featuring campaign messages, overlapping state functions and political activities.<sup>52</sup> Most incidents remained unaddressed by the State

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<sup>47</sup> Legal amendments adopted on 1 April 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, further evidencing the interconnection between officially independent candidates and parties.

<sup>48</sup> Campaign silence applies on election days and the day before. The law does not specify the official start of the campaign period for the second round of the presidential election.

<sup>49</sup> The law prohibits the use of campaign funds ahead of the official campaign period and forbids the publication of campaign advertisements in the media before the campaign period starts.

<sup>50</sup> For example, on 28 and 29 March, the presidential candidate endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE participated in a public debate and held a speech at a rally in Skopje. On 30 March and 2 April, the candidate endorsed by BDI/DUI-led coalition addressed the audience in a rally in Gostivar and held a political speech during an Iftar dinner in Skopje. On 30 March and 3 April, the candidate endorsed by the VLEN/VREDI coalition addressed the audience during an inauguration of a party office in Struga and held a speech at a rally in Skopje.

<sup>51</sup> For these elections, the four main parties were SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, BDI/DUI, and Besa.

<sup>52</sup> Between 20 March and 1 May, the mayor of Skopje and a candidate of *New Alternative*; the SDSM mayor of Skopje's Centar municipality and the SDSM Minister of Agriculture and Forestry; the mayor of Tetovo and leader of Besa part of the VLEN/VREDI coalition; and the VMRO-DPMNE leader and mayors of the Skopje municipalities of Aerodrom, Butel, Gazi Baba, Gjorche Petrov and Kisela Voda, and municipalities of Gevgelija, Petrovec and Zelenikovo announced several construction and reconstruction works of different infrastructures projects, community facilities, and other public works projects. See Paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#), which requires "a clear separation between the state and political parties".

Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), which is responsible for overseeing compliance with the relevant provisions (see also *Campaign Finance*).

All contestants are required to sign a Code on Fair and Democratic Elections in which they commit to not exert political pressure on citizens, particularly those employed in the public administration. However, in the period leading up to the parliamentary elections, several ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised allegations and concerns about vote buying in vulnerable communities, including the Roma and Turks, as well as pressure on voters, including on public sector employees. On 6 May, the MoIA reported that two individuals were arrested on charges of vote buying; however, the majority of these allegations remained uninvestigated before the elections.<sup>53</sup>

*All relevant authorities, including law enforcement agencies, should make concerted efforts to monitor, identify, and investigate allegations of electoral violations such as vote-buying, pressure on voters, and the misuse of administrative resources. Such investigations should be conducted in a thorough, timely, and transparent manner. Voters should be systematically informed about mechanisms for reporting violations.*

## B. CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

The campaign was competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected. Political parties and candidates held rallies, canvassed door-to-door, and disseminated flyers, posters, billboards, and digital content. There was a significant overlap in the activities and messages of the presidential and parliamentary campaigns, with prominent themes including the economy, countering corruption, EU accession, the country's foreign policy, and potential constitutional changes. As the campaign progressed, the tone became increasingly negative, with *ad hominem* attacks and occasional threats observed.<sup>54</sup>

The campaign featured few women political figures. Issues related to gender equality were largely neglected, except by Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, the presidential candidate endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, who frequently advocated for greater representation of women in politics. In most other events, references made to women concerned their roles within the family, reflecting long-standing gender stereotypes and discriminating against non-traditional families.<sup>55</sup> Women constituted only 30 per cent of the speakers at rallies observed by the ODIHR EOM, and represented roughly one-

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<sup>53</sup> In the campaign period, ODIHR EOM long-term observers (LTOs) were informed of allegations of vote buying and pressure on voters from the municipalities of Bitola, Chair, Delchevo, Gjorche Petrov, Gostivar, Lozovo, Karbinci, Kumanovo, Negotino, Shtip, Shuto Orizari, Tetovo, and Vinica, in connection with most major political parties, including the BDI/DUI-led coalition, the SDSM-led coalition, the VLEN/VREDI coalition, and the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition.

<sup>54</sup> 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 the VLEN/VREDI coalition 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 municipality of 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.

<sup>55</sup> 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".

third of the attendees at these events.<sup>56</sup> Youth issues received limited attention in the campaign, with the primary focus being on the emigration of young people. In the campaign events observed, roughly one-quarter of the attendees were youth.

*Relevant state and public institutions should take additional steps to enhance women's participation in the electoral process and political decision-making. Political parties should identify and address barriers to women's involvement in politics, including by conducting gender audits and reviewing and reforming intra-party practices that hinder their effective representation within party structures.*

Campaign messages were mostly presented in Macedonian and Albanian, and in some cases in the Bosnian, Romani, Serbian, Turkish, and Vlach languages. In addition to two presidential candidates in the first round, eight ethnic-Albanian political parties participated in the parliamentary race as parts of various coalitions. Ethnic-Bosniak, Roma, and Turk parties joined the parliamentary race as part of the BDI/DUI coalition. The Roma political party AVAJA registered candidate lists in four districts. Several ethnic minority party representatives reported to the ODIHR EOM that the current system of distributing campaign funds and other assets hampered their ability to campaign on an equal footing. Moreover, instances of discriminatory rhetoric, including the use of strongly nationalistic slogans, were observed throughout the campaign period, in some cases conflating the perceived actions of political parties with certain ethnic communities.<sup>57</sup>

### C. CAMPAIGNING ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

Approximately 80 per cent of North Macedonia's residents have internet access, with half having a social network account.<sup>58</sup> The most popular platforms are Facebook, used by 52.5 per cent of those over 13 years of age, and Instagram, used by 45.1 per cent. The digital campaign environment is not regulated by law. Only a few contestants adhered to the voluntary code of conduct for online activities developed by the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AAVMS).<sup>59</sup> In the run-up to the elections, there were no organized state efforts to identify or address disinformation and manipulative content. Although many contestants accused their opponents of disinformation, the alleged disinformation was not targeted at critical election processes, such as voter information, but instead pointed to examples of candidates misrepresenting their accomplishments or the extent of their support.<sup>60</sup>

*The legislature should consider, in consultation with the media regulator and other stakeholders, steps to regulate campaign activities and political advertising in online media and social network portals, and their financing.*

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<sup>56</sup> ODIHR EOM LTOs observed 79 campaign events of 7 political parties and 6 presidential candidates. Of these, there were 19 presidential campaign events, 12 parliamentary campaign 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.

<sup>57</sup> 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", and on 29 April, the party's leader posted a political programme calling for ethnic Macedonian state officials and the abolishment of political parties organized on the basis of ethnicity. During the campaign period, *the Left* made several derogatory comments against Bulgaria, Bulgarians and the EU. On 18 April, the leader of *the Left* posted on his Facebook account that: "Bulgarians in the Constitution is a treason, today begins the Bulgarian fascist occupation of Macedonia". Politicians from BDI/DUI publicly voiced interpretations that VMRO-DPMNE's slogan "Make Macedonia Yours" is anti-Albanian.

<sup>58</sup> According to the United Nations (UN) 2021 Republic of North Macedonia [Digital Development Country Profile](#), in 2020, 81.4 per cent of the population had access to the Internet. For social network usage, also see DataReportal [Digital 2024 Report](#), which concludes that social network usage stands at 45.4 per cent of the population.

<sup>59</sup> 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](#).

<sup>60</sup> 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.

Candidates campaigned actively on social networking platforms. The ODIHR EOM observed that contestants engaged audiences primarily by referencing offline campaign events.<sup>61</sup> Party leaders and candidates had a greater online engagement than their respective party accounts.<sup>62</sup> The leader of VMRO-DPMNE dominated online discourse, with 18 out of the 20 posts with the highest engagement.<sup>63</sup> Posting frequency aligned with distinct campaign strategies: the BDI/DUI-endorsed presidential candidate significantly increased posts just before the first election day, while SDSM's posting frequency rose around the campaign's start. Conversely, the leaders of *the Left*, the VLEN/VREDI coalition, and VMRO-DPMNE gradually increased their posting, peaking during the campaign launch week, indicating a steady, consistent engagement strategy. Most online messages promoted candidates and programmes in a neutral tone, but the rhetoric became increasingly negative once the parliamentary campaign started, particularly from the leaders of VMRO-DPMNE and *the Left*.<sup>64</sup>

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

### A. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Campaign finance is primarily regulated by the Electoral Code, the Law on Financing of Political Parties, and the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflicts of Interest. The March 2024 amendments to the Electoral Code narrowed the scope of interim campaign finance reporting, shortened the deadline for submitting the final financial report, and defined certain donation limits. While some of these amendments improved technical aspects of the campaign finance framework, they left a number of previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations unaddressed, and did not rectify systemic deficiencies identified by the State Audit Office (SAO) and the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC).<sup>65</sup>

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 utilized for campaign purposes, without legally specified limits.<sup>66</sup> Parties may also take loans to finance their campaigns. However, the limits, eligibility criteria, and other important details related to loans are not specified by the law. Third-party

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<sup>61</sup> The ODIHR EOM observed 19 Facebook accounts of presidential candidates, political parties and their leaders from 21 March to 18 May.

<sup>62</sup> 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 the VLEN/VREDI coalition (300,467 interactions), and the presidential candidate endorsed by SDSM (283,002 interactions).

<sup>63</sup> The 10 profiles that received the most engagement: 1. leader of VMRO-DPMNE, 2. presidential candidate endorsed by VLEN/VREDI coalition, 3. presidential candidate supported by the SDSM-led coalition, 4. presidential candidate supported by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, 5. leader of *the Left*, 6. presidential candidate endorsed by BDI/DUI-led coalition, 7. SDSM, 8. *the Left*, 9. leader of SDSM, 10. VMRO-DPMNE.

<sup>64</sup> For example, in a post of 9 April, the VMRO-DPMNE leader accused the SDSM presidential campaign of using “Balkan-macho”-style “cheap primitive insults” against the opposition candidate. On 21 April, the same party leader accused the government and the SEC of planning to manipulate the votes. On 26 April, an SDSM Facebook post accused VMRO-DPMNE of inflaming ethnic tensions to take the country back to the “ugly past”. On 30 April, *the Left* posted about an alleged attempt by “Bulgarian structures to resurrect neo-fascism” in North Macedonia.

<sup>65</sup> These recommendations include regulation of third-party financing of campaigns, reporting on in-kind contributions and loans, harmonizing timeframes and deadlines for the receipt and publication of reports, as well as providing adequate authority, resources, and sanctioning power to the oversight bodies. See also the SAO's [2022 Annual Report](#).

<sup>66</sup> In 2023, the total state funding allocated for parliamentary parties was approximately EUR 6.5 million.

campaigning is not regulated, contrary to international good practice and previous ODIHR recommendations.<sup>67</sup>

Presidential and parliamentary campaigns do not receive direct public funding. However, the state reimburses broadcast, print and online media outlets registered with the SEC for campaign advertisements. For parliamentary elections, the reimbursement formula favours the largest ruling and opposition coalitions in the parliament, disadvantaging small and non-parliamentary parties. As the law does not regulate how such funding should be applied to presidential elections, the SEC applied the same formula to presidential candidates who entered in contractual agreements with eligible parties, which resulted in the funding of presidential contestants mirroring the unequal funding of political parties.<sup>68</sup> The reimbursement formula and its application for the presidential election is inconsistent with OSCE commitments and the principle of equal opportunity to campaign.<sup>69</sup>

*Consideration should be given to revising the system of funding of electoral campaigns, based on objective, clear and reasonable criteria. For presidential candidates, public funds could be allocated equally, while for parliamentary campaigns, allocation could be proportionally based on parties' election results. For the campaign activities of non-parliamentary and newly established parties, the allocation of public funding should be considered, potentially based on minimum thresholds of support.*

Campaigns may be financed through monetary and in-kind donations, party membership fees or loans. Individual citizens can donate up to EUR 3,000, while legal entities may contribute up to EUR 30,000 per campaign.<sup>70</sup> By law, the expenditure limit is set at MKD 110 per election, per registered voter, in the electoral district, a limit that applies cumulatively across both rounds of the presidential election.<sup>71</sup> For these elections, the amount of donations reported by parliamentary contestants was significantly

<sup>67</sup> Paragraph 256 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states: “Third parties should be subjected to similar rules on donations and spending as political parties to avoid situations where third parties can be used to circumvent campaign finance regulations”.

<sup>68</sup> Paragraph 7.5 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to “respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination.” See also paragraph 1.2.3.a.iii. of the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#). The total funds allocated by the SEC for paid media advertisement for the presidential election was EUR 3.6 million, and in case of the second round, additional EUR 1.8 million. The funds were allocated as following: candidates affiliated to the two biggest parties in majority and minority respectively (Mr. Osmani, Mr. Pendarovski, Ms. Siljanovska-Davkova and Mr. Taravari) could use 90 per cent of these funds; seven per cent was shared among candidates endorsed by parties without a parliamentary group (Mr. Jakimovski and Ms. Vankovska-Cvetkovska); while the remaining 3 per cent was dedicated to the candidate endorsed by non-parliamentary parties, namely, Mr. Dimitrievski.

<sup>69</sup> The total funds allocated by the SEC for paid media advertisement for parliamentary elections was EUR 3.6 million. Of this amount, 45 per cent was shared between the SDSM-led 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. 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 Venice Commission Code of good practice in the field of political parties](#), paragraph 163.

<sup>70</sup> Donations from foreign or anonymous sources, municipal governments, state-owned companies, religious and charitable organizations, and from the media are prohibited.

<sup>71</sup> One euro equals MKD 62 (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.

lower than the funds allocated for campaign reimbursement by the state.<sup>72</sup> Donations to campaign accounts can be made even after the final results are announced, a practice that some ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including from oversight institutions, considered as increasing the potential for clientelism.

*To prevent avenues for quid pro quo transactions, legal provisions regarding donations to electoral campaigns should be revised to harmonize donation timelines with the campaign period and remove the possibility of donating to campaign accounts after the elections.*

There are no provisions in the law to regulate paid political advertising on social networking platforms, and no institution responsible for the oversight of the financing of online campaign activities.<sup>73</sup>

## **B. DISCLOSURE AND OVERSIGHT**

All electoral contestants are required to compile three interim reports: two before and one after the elections. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, financial reports cannot be submitted electronically and are not audited. All reports must be submitted to the State Audit Office (SAO), the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), and the SEC, which are required to publish them on their websites, though not within any legally prescribed deadline. A final financial report is due to the SAO within 60 days after the election results are announced, with an audit to be completed within a further 60 days. The deadlines for the submission of the final financial reports are too long to allow timely audits, and are contrary to international good practice and a previous ODIHR recommendation.<sup>74</sup>

Legal amendments from March 2024 removed the requirement of reporting expenditures in interim reports, rendering their scope to contributions only, and reducing transparency. The instructions provided by the Ministry of Finance further excluded information necessary for adequate financial oversight, which led to political parties submitting non-uniform or incomplete interim reports, further reducing transparency and accountability.<sup>75</sup> Expenses incurred by political parties in support of presidential candidates are not subject to financial reporting, neither by the presidential candidates nor by the political parties in their annual financial reports. Some parliamentary contestants did not submit their interim reports in a timely manner or in the required format. Contrary to the law, the SCPC did not

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<sup>72</sup> Reported donations from individuals and legal entities were EUR 659,768; out of this sum, 86 per cent was accounted by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition. Article 1 of the Appendix to [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 states that State support should be limited to reasonable contributions. Objective, fair and reasonable criteria should be applied regarding the distribution of state support. See also paragraph 205 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) that states that when developing legislation for political finance systems, states should make sure to create a balanced system of private and public funding, including fair criteria for the allocation of public financial support.

<sup>73</sup> According to the [Meta Ad Library](#), during the parliamentary campaign period, candidate lists, parties that support them and their lead individuals spent a total of EUR 121,713 on advertising, with the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition spending EUR 53,484 and the SDSM-led coalition spending EUR 29,637. Simultaneously, two presidential candidates in the run-off campaign directly incurred total advertising costs of approximately EUR 17,374. Of this expenditure, the presidential candidate endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition accounted for EUR 12,447, while the candidate endorsed by SDSM-led coalition accounted for EUR 4,927.

<sup>74</sup> Paragraph 200 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) recommends that “[r]eports on campaign financing should be turned into the proper authorities within a period of no more than 30 days after the elections”.

<sup>75</sup> According to the instruction, interim reporting did not have to include information on in-kind contributions, loans, and funds transferred by political parties. Also, for parliamentary elections, it was not required to include breakdown of expenditures per electoral district, making it difficult to track whether contestants adhered to the spending cap for each electoral district, as required by law. See paragraphs 258 and 261 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#).

initiate proceedings against these parties.<sup>76</sup> Overall, while the number and timing of interim reports, and their submission to three different institutions, placed a significant administrative burden on contestants, these measures did not enhance the transparency of campaign finances.

*All campaign finance reports should include information on contributions and expenses incurred, including those by political parties supporting presidential candidates. Reports should be submitted electronically in an easily searchable format and made public immediately upon submission. The deadlines for the submission and audit of final financial reports should be shortened to align with international good practice.*

The SCPC can initiate *ex officio* investigations into campaign finance violations, based on unofficial reports, or upon receipt of a formal complaint, and is required to issue a resolution within five days. Following the announcement of the elections, the SCPC initiated 42 cases based on unofficial reports and 3 *ex officio*, applying a general 60-day deadline rather than the legally determined five days, which was only applied to one formal complaint.<sup>77</sup> Due to financial constraints and unlike in previous elections, the SCPC did not deploy field monitors to identify potential misuse of administrative resources and monitor campaign spending, nor did it inspect contestants' bank accounts during the campaign period, impacting the overall effectiveness of oversight. Moreover, the SCPC hired analysts to scrutinize financial reports late in the process, and these analysts had limited access to information, further decreasing the scope of analysis.<sup>78</sup>

*To enhance the transparency and effectiveness of campaign finance oversight, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption and the State Audit Office should be adequately resourced and possess the necessary technical expertise. These institutions should conduct effective scrutiny of campaign finance and give proper and timely consideration to all reports and complaints concerning alleged irregularities.*

## **X. MEDIA**

### **A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

The media landscape is diverse, with 40 television stations, 58 radio stations, and 22 print media outlets nationwide, as well as over 200 online portals. Television is the main source of information, but online news portals are increasingly influential. While the media environment is generally free, the quality of journalism is negatively affected by political fragmentation, ethnic divisions, intense competition among numerous media outlets in a constrained market, and unfavourable working conditions of journalists, leading to self-censorship and a lack of investigative journalism.

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<sup>76</sup> Only 10 of the 17 parliamentary contestants submitted their interim reports in line with the legal provisions. Of the total of 34 reports required in the 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. Presidential candidates submitted their interim reports in timely manner, with some of them reporting no donations in the reporting periods. The SAO, the SEC and the SCPC posted the first reports online the day after submission, while second reports were published promptly only by the SCPC.

<sup>77</sup> Most cases were related to violations of prohibitions of new investments and employments, as well as public promotion of state-funded projects after the election announcement. For 9 of these cases, even this general rule of 60 days was not respected, and cases resolutions were pending as of election day.

<sup>78</sup> The SCPC announced the vacancy notice during the second week of the presidential campaign, two days before the parliamentary campaign started. According to the SCPC, the analysts, hired as consultants, lacked clearance to access internal databases and contestants' bank accounts, and only had access only to publicly available reports.

Amendments in November 2022 to the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, along with the February 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code, introduced enhanced safeguards for journalists.<sup>79</sup> These amendments, together with the appointment since 2022 of four public prosecutors to expedite the resolution of lawsuits involving journalists, have contributed to greater institutional trust, according to ODIHR EOM interlocutors.<sup>80</sup> Despite these positive trends, online attacks, including against women journalists, isolated incidents of physical assaults and intimidation lawsuits (including SLAPPS) targeting media workers remain a concern.<sup>81</sup>

## B. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Constitution guarantees freedoms of expression and the media. The Electoral Code requires that all media outlets, including online news portals, cover the elections in a fair, balanced and unbiased manner, and enumerates detailed requirements and timeframes for airing campaign material as well as sanctions for failure to comply.<sup>82</sup> However, these provisions only address coverage of political parties rather than presidential candidates, and as with campaign funding, they favour the largest ruling and opposition coalitions, limiting the opportunities for all candidates to have equal access to media (see also *Legal Framework, Campaign and Campaign Finance*).<sup>83</sup>

Provisions of the Electoral Code that allow funding for paid political advertising in the media directly from the state budget were criticized by many ODIHR EOM interlocutors, who perceive this measure as entrenching media dependence on state funds. Moreover, although media outlets are required to register with the SEC for the reimbursement of political advertising, there are no specific rules regulating the eligibility of online news portals for such funding. Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors asserted that a significant number of portals were created immediately before the elections to receive state funds during election campaigns and, in some cases, to channel these funds to political parties.

*The practice of state funding being paid directly to media outlets could be reconsidered. If maintained, to increase accountability and transparency, the legislation should establish clear and objective criteria for the eligibility of online news portals for state reimbursement of paid political advertisements.*

The public broadcaster, despite legal amendments introduced in July 2023 aimed at improving its funding, remains primarily financed from the state budget.<sup>84</sup> Amendments made to the Law on Media and the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services in March 2024 introduced public subsidies for print media and removed the ban on state-funded advertisements in private media for public interest

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<sup>79</sup> The amendments, among other measures, increased penalties for assaulting journalists or media workers and a reduction in defamation fines for journalists, editors, and media outlets.

<sup>80</sup> The Prosecutor's Office is in direct contact with the "Association of Journalists of Macedonia" (AJM) and can initiate criminal cases on behalf of media practitioners, thus reducing the burden of private prosecutions.

<sup>81</sup> According to 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 media practitioners reported regular online attacks to the ODIHR EOM, with a growing number of cases against women journalists. Often, these cases are not reported or prosecuted. CASE, the Coalition against SLAPPS (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) in Europe, [documented](#) five recent intimidation lawsuits in North Macedonia.

<sup>82</sup> The public broadcaster is required to follow strict rules governing the attribution of time in its broadcasts during election periods and must allocate free airtime for electoral candidates and hold debates between the main ruling and opposition parties as well as presidential candidates. Other media outlets are entitled to offer paid political advertisements.

<sup>83</sup> For these elections, the four main parties were SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, BDI/DUI, and the VLEN/VREDI coalition.

<sup>84</sup> Pursuant to the amendments, the funds for financing public broadcasters are provided from the state budget in a fixed 1 percentage of the total tax revenues, improving the stability of funding. The public broadcaster still operates under an expired management since 2019 due to a lack of consensus on the appointment of programme council members in parliament.



information campaigns.<sup>85</sup> The amendments were adopted with the declared aim of enhancing the sector's sustainability. However, many ODIHR EOM interlocutors criticized this change as likely to increase political influence over the media, a sector already dependent on state subsidies.

*To ensure equitable access to resources and contribute to a higher quality and more diverse overall media environment, alternative funding methods for print, broadcast and online media outlets within a secure and transparent framework could be explored, based on inclusive consultations with all relevant stakeholders.*

The Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AAVMS) is responsible for regulating broadcast media and conducting media monitoring during the campaign period.<sup>86</sup> Prior to the elections, the AAVMS issued several election-related guidelines, including on the distribution of budget-funded airtime for campaigning and the applicability of campaign silence in the media.<sup>87</sup> During the campaign, it published a statement reproaching advertising by SDSM and BDI/DUI, which included the participation of minors, and initiated misdemeanour proceedings against *Klan Macedonia* for breaking the election silence and *Alfa TV* for exceeding limits on paid political advertising. The AAVMS enjoyed the trust of stakeholders during the campaign, with ODIHR EOM interlocutors noting its professional conduct and some suggesting that extending its mandate to oversee online news portals would further enhance oversight.<sup>88</sup>

### C. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN [ACCESS DETAILED INFORMATION](#)

The ODIHR EOM media monitoring established that the media provided extensive coverage of the parliamentary and presidential campaigns.<sup>89</sup> The public broadcaster *Macedonian Radio Television (MRT)* covered all contestants in line with legal provisions for allocating time to political parties in newscasts.<sup>90</sup> On private broadcasters, coverage of the presidential and parliamentary campaigns often

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<sup>85</sup> Pursuant to the amendments advocated for by the major private national broadcasters, a commission of state campaigns composed of representatives from the major political parties but not including CSOs or the AAVMS, will select the projects presented through the campaigns of public interest, distributing 0.1 per cent of the state budget for this purpose.

<sup>86</sup> Due to a lack of agreement between the parliamentary parties on the appointments of members of the regulator's council, the agency has operated under an expired management since 2019.

<sup>87</sup> According to the AAVMS guidelines, the 9.5 minutes of budget-funded paid airtime per hour was distributed as follows: four minutes combined to the candidates endorsed by SDSM and BDI/DUI (as the two parties that won most votes in the latest parliamentary elections); four minutes combined for the candidates endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE and the VLEN/VREDI coalition (as the two biggest opposition parties); one minute combined to the candidates endorsed by the *Left* and the GROM-led coalition (as parliamentary parties without a faction); and 30 seconds to ZNAM, as well all other parties not represented in the parliament. On 26 April, the AAVMS issued new guidelines to redistribute the presidential airtime among the two candidates who remained in the race; this amendment did not affect the distribution of airtime for the parliamentary race.

<sup>88</sup> Before the elections, a coordination body consisting of representatives of the AAVMS and CSOs was created to register and publish related notifications, but the body lacks enforcement powers.

<sup>89</sup> The ODIHR EOM monitoring included 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.

<sup>90</sup> Newscasts of the public broadcaster *MRT* are subject to stringent regulations during the campaign period: it is obliged to dedicate 30 per cent of its newscasts to general events, 30 per cent to the ruling parties, 30 per cent to the parliamentary opposition, and 10 per cent to non-parliamentary parties and independent candidates. In practice, 30 per cent of its electoral coverage in newscasts had to be allocated to the two candidates endorsed by the SDSM and BDI/DUI combined, a total 30 per cent between the four candidates endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE, the *Left*, the VLEN/VREDI coalition, and GROM, and 10 per cent to the candidate by ZNAM. According to the ODIHR EOM media monitoring, the coalitions led by SDSM and BDI/DUI, along with government actors, received 41 per cent of the coverage dedicated to contestants during prime-time newscasts on *MRT*, while major opposition parties accounted for 46 per cent of airtime.

overlapped.<sup>91</sup> These media outlets devoted most of their election coverage to paid political advertising, primarily focusing on the four major coalitions and their endorsed presidential candidates.<sup>92</sup> In total, about 25 per cent of the election-related airtime was dedicated to women candidates, mainly the presidential candidates endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE and the *Left*.

In the first round of the presidential election, *Telma* dedicated equal airtime to all seven contestants. *Alsat-M* allocated almost equal coverage (16 to 19 per cent) to contestants endorsed by the four major parties. *Sitel* mainly focused on candidates endorsed by SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, allotting each 20 per cent of its election-related content. *Kanal 5* focused on the same two candidates, giving each 22 per cent of its coverage. The tone of the coverage across all channels was neutral, except for *Alfa TV*, which presented the SDSM-endorsed candidate negatively in some 51 per cent of its coverage. Among the online news portals, *Kurir.mk* devoted 71 per cent of its coverage to the candidate endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE, and *Tetovasot.com* dedicated nearly 50 per cent to the BDI/DUI candidate, both in a largely positive tone.

In the presidential run-off, most broadcasters allocated equal time to the two contestants and maintained a neutral tone. However, *Alfa TV* and the online news portal *Kurir.mk* dedicated the majority of coverage to the VMRO-DPMNE-endorsed candidate (68 and 64 per cent, respectively). During this period, Albanian-language media outlets allocated coverage mainly to the two ethnic-Albanian first-round presidential candidates, who were no longer in the race: *Tetovasot.com* focused on the candidate endorsed by BDI/DUI (47 per cent), while *Lajmpress.org* extensively covered the VLEN/VREDI-endorsed candidate (40 per cent), both in a largely positive tone.

Most broadcasters maintained a largely neutral tone in the coverage of the parliamentary campaign. *Alsat-M* and *Telma* provided 15 to 23 per cent of coverage to each of the coalitions endorsed by the four main parties in parliament. Conversely, *Kanal 5* primarily focused on SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE (28 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively). Among the online news portals, *Kurir.mk* devoted 74 per cent of its coverage to VMRO-DPMNE, and *Tetovasot.com* dedicated 68 per cent to BDI/DUI, both in a largely positive tone.

In line with its legal obligations, *MRT* featured several televised debates that included the major contestants in the parliamentary elections and all presidential candidates. Three debates between the run-off candidates were held on private national broadcasters, allowing voters to make an informed choice. 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.<sup>93</sup>

## XI. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Regulations on mechanisms for election dispute resolution are in place. However, their application is limited by ambiguities and gaps in the legislation, including with respect to conflicting deadlines and

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<sup>91</sup> For example, between the two election days, broadcasters allocated 49 per cent of their prime-time coverage to the parliamentary elections, 30 per cent to the run-off and 21 per cent to elections in general.

<sup>92</sup> For example, more than 60 per cent of the election-related content on private broadcasters *Sitel* and *Alsat-M* was paid political advertising.

<sup>93</sup> 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.

parallel avenues for submission of complaints and appeals.<sup>94</sup> Voters only have legal standing with respect to individual voting rights, and the right to appeal election results is limited to the representatives of those who nominated the candidates; both limitations are at odds with international good practice.<sup>95</sup> 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, while the Administrative Court reviews appeals against SEC decisions and SCPC decisions on the misuse of administrative resources.<sup>96</sup> The Constitutional Court assesses the constitutionality of election-related legal acts or decisions. Positively, the March 2024 legal amendments clarified some deadlines for appeals on election day. However, contrary to international good practice and previous ODIHR recommendations, deadlines for filing and reviewing complaints remain too short for complainants to prepare meaningful applications and for the courts to issue substantiated decisions.<sup>97</sup>

*To ensure access to effective legal remedies, the legal framework should be reviewed to eliminate undue restrictions on voters' rights to lodge electoral complaints and appeals.*

*Consideration should be given to extending the deadlines for applications and decisions on electoral complaints and appeals to align with international good practice.*

Overall, the SEC's handling of complaints did not ensure access to effective legal remedies. The SEC launched its online complaint submission system less than 3 weeks before election day, limiting the opportunity to lodge complaints before that. Most complaints received by the SEC were submitted on the two election days and pertained to voter registration. According to information from the SEC-operated complaints database, decisions on many of these complaints were not adopted in a timely manner, partly due to delays in communication with the MECs, which potentially affected citizens' ability to exercise their voting rights.<sup>98</sup> The SEC did not publish most of its decisions on complaints and did not provide justification for the majority of decisions available to the ODIHR EOM for review,

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<sup>94</sup> Parallel submissions are stipulated to SEC regional offices, MECs, and the SEC. Articles 49-a, 50-a, 148, and 149 prescribe different deadlines for resolving identical issues. Procedures in Article 151 are not comprehensively specified, and the scope partially overlaps with those under Article 148; see also Article 69-a in conjunction with Articles 73 and 179-b (1). See paragraph II.3.3. of the 2002 Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.

<sup>95</sup> Paragraph II.3.3(f) of the 2002 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”.

<sup>96</sup> The law designates MECs to decide on election-day violations of individual voting rights; in practice, they forward voters' requests to the SEC for decision.

<sup>97</sup> The SEC has to resolve voter registration complaints within 2-4 hours and complaints related to election campaigns and challenges to election results within 72 hours. The Administrative Court makes decisions on appeals mostly within 24-48 hours. A number of complaints filed to the SEC via MECs were not decided within the legally prescribed deadlines. To comply with the deadlines, the Administrative Court scheduled hearings on electoral appeals, outside of the office hours of the judiciary. 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 defence and a reflected decision. A time limit of three to five days at first instance (both for lodging appeals and making rulings) seems reasonable”.

<sup>98</sup> According to figures from the SEC database, of 362 complaints the SEC received on the 24 April election day, 114 remained unresolved by the close of the polls (248 were decided: 136 were granted, 71 were rejected, and 41 were considered inadmissible). Of 610 voter registration complaints received by the SEC between the two election days, less than 50 per cent (274) were decided by the 8 May elections (46 were granted, 20 were rejected, and 25 were considered inadmissible). Of the 490 complaints received on the 8 May election day, 283 were fully resolved by the close of the polls (199 were granted, 68 were rejected, and 16 were considered inadmissible); of the complaints that remained unresolved, 103 had been decided by the SEC, but the verification of the decision was not issued to the affected voters by the MECs, while the others were not examined.

many of which contained a variety of deficiencies.<sup>99</sup> Only 39 complaints, mostly related to early voting, were examined in public sessions. The Administrative Court overturned the SEC's rejection of a complaint alleging election fraud in a polling station in Lipkovo municipality in the first round of the presidential election, finding that the SEC had not thoroughly examined the election materials. After the parliamentary elections, the SEC received 26 complaints contesting the results, which led to the invalidation of results in 7 polling stations (see *Post-Election Developments*).

*Greater access to legal remedies should be facilitated, such as through a fully functional online submission system. The election administration should thoroughly examine all complaints in a timely manner and adopt substantiated decisions, which should be published promptly.*

The Administrative Court reviewed four appeals related to SEC decisions on voter registration and four appeals concerning the registration of parliamentary candidates. Contrary to legal obligations, the Court did not publish its decisions on voter registration and did not hear these cases in public sessions. The Court upheld an SCPC decision about violations of the ban on employment ahead of the first-round election day, after two rounds of revisions. Following the parliamentary elections, the Administrative Court upheld all SEC decisions invalidating polling station results (see *Post-Election Developments*).

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 regarding campaign conditions for candidates nominated by groups of voters without party affiliation, which the appellants claimed were 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 other remained undecided after the elections. The Court attributed the delays to the lack of expedited deadlines for constitutional review.

Many IEOM interlocutors voiced doubts about the fairness and efficiency of the 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. The Administrative Court and some SEC members cited having experienced political pressure during the resolution of post-electoral complaints.<sup>100</sup>

## **XII. ELECTION OBSERVATION**

The Electoral Code allows for citizen and international observation and entitles contestants to appoint representatives to all levels of the election administration, contributing to transparency.<sup>101</sup> Although the legislation does not regulate observer accreditation for presidential run-offs, positively, the SEC interpreted that all accreditations remain valid until the completion of the process, and permitted

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<sup>99</sup> The ODIHR EOM was able to obtain 72 decisions issued on 24 April on voter registration, 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 these elections. 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".

<sup>100</sup> The SEC [alleged](#) political pressure after deciding on complaints related to election results. See also a similar [statement in the media](#) by the President of the Administrative Court. Political influence was alleged in a case decided by the Tetovo basic court on determination of the Alliance of Albanians party leadership, where the decision was made after recusal of three judges, allegedly due to political pressure. During the electoral period, the president of the Constitutional Court also [reported](#) threats against her, attributing them to her work.

<sup>101</sup> Citizen and foreign associations registered at least one year before election day with statutes that include the protection of human rights, along with international organizations and representatives of foreign countries, may apply for accreditation with the SEC until 10 days prior to election day.

additional requests to be submitted prior to the second round. In an inclusive manner, the SEC accredited 915 citizen and 544 international observers for the first election day and 1,303 citizen and 771 international observers for the second election day.

Citizen observer activities were minimal prior to the elections, with most ODIHR EOM interlocutors attributing this to a lack of funding and shift in the focus of CSO activities. *CIVIL – Center for Freedom* conducted long-term observation, monitoring campaigns on media and social networks, as well as tracking disinformation and inter-community relations. *Roma for Democracy* provided civic and voter education in Roma communities to address potential undue influence on voters and vote buying. Regrettably, *CIVIL* representatives reported that the organization received hostile verbal attacks on social networks during the campaign period. Additionally, *Roma for Democracy* reported direct threats to two observers from party representatives at a polling station, as well as having their access to polling stations blocked by EB members in five municipalities on the presidential election day.<sup>102</sup>

### XIII. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DAY

The first-round presidential election day of 24 April was well-administered and peaceful.<sup>103</sup> Campaign silence regulations were generally respected, including in the media. The ODIHR EOM social network monitoring observed that several presidential candidates and party leaders posted messages on social networks urging citizens to cast their votes. The law is silent on the applicability of campaign silence regulations on social networks.

#### A. OPENING AND VOTING

The opening of polls was assessed as positive in 83 of the 93 observed polling stations, with legally prescribed procedures generally adhered to. However, delays were recorded in 29 polling stations, including four instances exceeding 30 minutes, mostly due to technical difficulties in setting up the biometric voter identification devices (BVID).

The IEOM positively assessed voting in 99 per cent of the 925 polling stations observed, describing the process as smooth and well-organized and the EBs as cooperative.<sup>104</sup> EBs largely followed the procedures, including identifying voters and ensuring that they signed the voter lists. However, more than half of the observed polling stations did not inform voters about the voting procedures as legally required, which is important to reduce the number of invalid ballots. In 11 per cent of the polling stations, one or more voters were turned away, primarily because they did not have acceptable ID or were not listed in voter lists at that polling station. Although BVIDs were operational in nearly all cases, in 28 per cent of the observations, not every voter could be identified successfully by fingerprint scanning. Group or family voting occurred in 2 per cent of the observations (17 cases).

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<sup>102</sup> Roma for Democracy held a demonstration on 2 May, requesting additional protection for its observers. In response, the SEC appealed to electoral personnel for observer access throughout the electoral process, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced increased police presence on the 8 May election day.

<sup>103</sup> On election day, the law enforcement shared regular updates with the public on reported irregularities, including cases of vote buying, and intimidation. However, there were allegations reported in the media of police inaction in connection to some of these cases. In the evening, the VLEN/VREDI coalition held a press conference, urging the Ministry of Internal Affairs to take action regarding the Chief Commander Officer of the Tetovo Regional Police, who refused to cooperate with the advisor deployed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to monitor the security of the electoral process.

<sup>104</sup> The SEC announced that three polling stations in the municipality of Kumanovo did not open for voting, one due to missing the EB stamp and two due to malfunction of the BVID, and four other polling stations in municipalities of Delchevo, Demir Hisar, Lipkovo, and Mogila had to prolong voting due to technical issues leading to interruption of voting for more than one hour.

While not against the law, in 2 per cent of the observed polling stations (20 instances), persons other than EB members were keeping track the identity of voters who had voted, which could indicate pressure on voters. Secrecy of the vote was generally maintained, but it was sometimes compromised in smaller polling stations with few registered voters. Based on the SEC decision of 2 April, 644 voters registered at 120 polling stations with fewer than 10 voters were reassigned to the nearest polling stations, with these voters casting their ballots in separate ballot boxes and those ballots counted separately, potentially compromising vote secrecy.

*To ensure the secrecy of the vote, legal criteria for establishing polling stations should be reviewed. In particular, polling stations with fewer than ten voters should be merged with nearby polling stations and their ballots cast together.*

IEOM observers found the voting process largely transparent. Authorized representatives of contestants monitored the voting process in some 77 per cent, and citizen observers were present in 9 percent of the polling stations, contributing to transparency. In the observed polling stations, women comprised 51 per cent of the EB members and 61 per cent of the chairpersons. Unfortunately, approximately half of the observed polling stations were not independently accessible for persons with physical disabilities, and the layout was unsuitable for such voters in every fifth polling station.

## **B. COUNTING AND TABULATION**

Counting was assessed as efficient in 81 of the 90 observations. Negative assessments were made of 9 polling stations due to EBs omitting important key procedural steps or not completing the prescribed procedures before the count. Serious procedural errors observed by the IEOM included not counting voter signatures (21 cases), failing to invalidate unused ballots (21 cases), and not recording all data in the results protocols (18 cases). Procedures were not performed in the prescribed sequence or were done concurrently in 50 instances, negatively impacting transparency. In eight observations, the validity of ballots was inconsistently determined or was disputed by some EB members. In 10 cases, persons other than EB members were seen handling ballots, raising concerns over the integrity of the count. IEOM observers noted that EB members had difficulty filling protocols in 17 counts.<sup>105</sup> In 26 polling stations, EBs did not publicly post protocols as required by law.

The results tabulation process, observed in 74 MECs, was evaluated as efficient and transparent, despite occasional overcrowding mainly due to inadequate layouts. Discrepancies in some EB results protocols were noted in 47 MECs; in 19 cases, EB members were seen completing or correcting protocols, indicating insufficient understanding of the counting procedures. Tabulation was generally completed by the early hours of 25 April. After the polls closed, the SEC began posting partial results, received electronically from polling stations, and announced preliminary results based on 90 per cent of protocols shortly before midnight. Voter turnout was reported at 49.92 percent.

## **C. ANNOUNCEMENT OF FIRST-ROUND PRESIDENTIAL RESULTS**

Following the resolution of a complaint challenging results for a polling station in Lipkovo municipality (see *Election Dispute Resolution*), the SEC announced the final results of the first round of presidential election on 2 May. The results indicated that none of the seven candidates had obtained more than half the votes of all registered voters, a requirement for a first-round victory. In line with the Constitution, a presidential run-off was set for 8 May between the two top candidates, the incumbent

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<sup>105</sup> IEOM observers reported a difference in the Macedonian and Albanian instructions in the results protocol forms, leading to confusion over their filling and discrepancies among the protocols.

Stevo Pendarovski (endorsed by the SDSM-led coalition) and the opposition candidate, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova (endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition).<sup>106</sup>

#### XIV. PARLIAMENTARY AND PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF ELECTION DAY

The parliamentary and second-round presidential election day of 8 May was generally calm and peaceful.<sup>107</sup> Similar to the first-round presidential election day, the ODIHR EOM noted presidential candidates and party leaders posting messages on social networks urging citizens to vote, occasionally including campaign messages, potentially challenging campaign silence regulations.

##### A. OPENING AND VOTING

The IEOM positively evaluated the opening procedures at 120 of the 123 polling stations observed. EB members were largely familiar with the procedures and maintained transparency. However, some procedures were not followed consistently: opening protocols were not completed and signed before voting began in 24 instances; ballot boxes were not properly sealed in 10 cases; and the serial number of security seals was not recorded in the logbook in 4 cases. EB members encountered difficulties in configuring the BVIDs in 11 instances. Most polling stations opened with delays of no more than 15 minutes.<sup>108</sup>

Voting was positively assessed in 99 percent of the 1,340 polling stations observed. Procedural safeguards such as voter identification, stamping of ballot papers, and signing of voter lists were generally correctly implemented. BVIDs were set up and operational in nearly all instances, but in 24 per cent of the cases observed by the IEOM, the machines failed to identify some eligible voters through fingerprint scanning. 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), frequently under the disguise of assisted voting, which primarily impacted women's opportunity to cast their vote freely and in secret. In 4 per cent of the polling stations (41 observations), non-EB members were observed to be tracking voters who had voted. In 18 instances, ballot boxes were not properly sealed. The legal requirement for EBs to inform voters about voting procedures was not followed in approximately 41 percent of the polling stations.<sup>109</sup>

*To prevent group voting and preserve free choice for each voter, the State Election Commission should enhance training sessions and voter education campaigns. Election officials should enforce effective procedural safeguards during voting, such as informing voters about the voting process and upholding rules for assisted voting to prevent group or family voting.*

Candidate or political party representatives were present in 86 percent of the polling stations observed. Citizen or international observers were only present in 7 percent of the observations. In more than 99 per cent of the polling stations, all authorized persons present had a clear view of the process and almost

<sup>106</sup> 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.

<sup>107</sup> On 8 May, isolated election-related incidents were reported by the prosecutor's office and the police, including alleged attempts to influence 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.

<sup>108</sup> 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.

<sup>109</sup> 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.

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. Unfortunately, approximately half of the observed polling stations did not provide for independent access for persons with physical disabilities, and the layout was unsuitable for such voters in one out of five stations.

## **B. COUNTING AND TABULATION**

IEOM observers assessed the counting process negatively in 16 of the 106 observed polling stations due to procedural errors and omissions, which were generally attributed to mistakes, a lack of understanding of procedures by EB members and attempts to speed up the process. Omissions included not following the prescribed order of the procedures in 53 cases, failing to count voter signatures in 24 cases, and not invalidating unused ballots in 28 cases. Transparency was compromised when authorized persons present did not have a clear view of the count in 10 cases, EB chairpersons did not consistently display ballots in 35 cases, and ballots were displayed with markings not visible in 16 cases. EBs had difficulties in filling in the results protocols in 26 observations. In 19 polling stations, EB members pre-signed the protocols before finishing the counts. In 14 instances, persons not belonging to the EBs participated in the counting.

Results tabulation was evaluated as efficient and smooth in 64 of the 66 MECs observed. However, in nine instances, inadequate MEC premises, mainly due to insufficient space, caused overcrowding and diminished transparency. Despite additional training on filling results protocols between the two election days, various mistakes and discrepancies, mainly arithmetical errors requiring corrections, 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.

*The SEC should take measures to lower the incidence of procedural inconsistencies during the vote count and arithmetic mistakes on results protocols, including by revising procedures and results protocols and enhancing the training of election board members.*

After the closing of polls, the SEC published partial results disaggregated by polling station on an ongoing basis. Preliminary voter turnout was announced at 55.36 percent for the parliamentary elections and 47.48 percent for the presidential run-off. This data indicated lower voter participation in the presidential race in ethnic-Albanian majority areas, which also experienced a higher number of invalid ballots.<sup>110</sup>

## **XV. POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS**

Following the parliamentary elections, the SEC received 26 complaints contesting the polling station results and the overall results in 2 electoral districts (EDs). After examining the materials and recounting the votes from the affected polling stations in a public session, the SEC granted six complaints filed by the VLEN/VREDI coalition and VMRO-DPMNE, leading to the invalidation of results in seven polling

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<sup>110</sup> On election day, widespread speculation circulated on social networks suggesting that some ethnic-Albanian political parties discouraged their supporters from voting in the presidential run-off. Based on preliminary turnout data by the SEC, the average turnout in municipalities with an ethnic-Albanian majority 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. In many such municipalities, the low turnout further coincided with high rates of invalid ballots, e.g., 32.6 per cent in Lipkovo with turnout of 7.4 per cent, 17.8 per cent in Bogovinje with 11.9 per cent turnout, or 16.8 per cent in Tearce with the turnout of 20.5 per cent.



stations.<sup>111</sup> The law mandates the invalidation of polling station results in case certain procedural irregularities are identified, regardless of their extent. In line with these provisions, in some polling stations, results were invalidated due to minor discrepancies.<sup>112</sup> The SEC conducted recounts of the votes concurrently, which compromised transparency. Moreover, in the decision-making process, some SEC members were observed voting along party lines, which may demonstrate a deviation from their legal obligations of professional performance.<sup>113</sup> In most decisions dismissing complaints, the SEC did not substantiate its findings and conclusions.<sup>114</sup>

Upon appeals by the BDU/DUI-led coalition, following repeated examination of the electoral material and recounts of the votes cast, the Administrative Court upheld all SEC decisions invalidating polling station results. The Electoral Code prescribes that voting shall be repeated in polling stations only if repeat voting might impact the election outcome, at odds with international good practice. Moreover, the law does not provide solutions for cases where the overall results may be affected by the cumulative invalidation of several polling station results, potentially allowing discretionary decisions by the institutions.<sup>115</sup>

*The rules in the Electoral Code for invalidating election results should be reviewed to ensure they are proportionate to the violations found. Invalidation should be considered only for serious violations that affect the results, and could be conditional on a defined threshold. For all invalidations, the law should require repeated voting.*

Voting was rerun at the affected polling stations on 22 May. A complaint challenging the results of the repeat vote at a polling station in Zhelino municipality, submitted by BDU/DUI, was rejected by the SEC and eventually by the Administrative Court. The repeat elections resulted in the shifting of one mandate from the BDI/DUI-led coalition to the VLEN/VREDI coalition. The final results of the presidential run-off were announced on 11 May, while the parliamentary results were confirmed by the SEC per electoral district between 18 May and 30 May. Overall, 41 of the 120 members of the new parliament are women (34 percent), a significant decrease from the previous composition of 42.5 percent. The elected president is the first woman president of the country.

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<sup>111</sup> The complaints challenged the results in 137 PSs within 4 EDs and the results in 2 EDs. The VLEN/VREDI coalition submitted 9 complaints related to 9 PSs, and the VMRO-DPMNE coalition submitted 8 complaints related to 109 PSs, challenging some results in EDs no. 5 and 6. The SDSM coalition submitted 5 complaints on 17 PSs. Of the 4 complaints submitted by *the Left*, 2 challenged results in EDs no. 1 and 2, and 2 concerned 2 PSs in ED no. 2. The VLEN/VREDI coalition eventually withdrew 3 of its complaints. The results were invalidated in ED 5 at PSs 1470/1 and 1470 in Dolneni, PSs 1194 and 1202 in Krushevo, PS 1844 in Struga, and PS 1272 in Ohrid, as well as in ED 6 at PS 2101 in Zhelino.

<sup>112</sup> The law requires invalidation of results in cases of discrepancies between the number of voters who voted and the number of ballot papers in the ballot box, discrepancies between the number of fingerprints recorded by the BVID and the ballot papers in the ballot box, or violations of the Electoral Code. Results were invalidated in several polling stations due to discrepancies ranging from 1 to 4 votes or minor mistakes in the protocols.

<sup>113</sup> Some SEC members supported actions proposed by their respective nominating parties, such as putting to vote party initiatives that, by law, could only be initiated by the SEC *ex officio*, including recounts in PSs with a significant number of voters who were not successfully identified by BVIDs which does not *per se* constitute an irregularity.

<sup>114</sup> While most granted cases established irregularities through comparison of data in results protocols and BVIDs, no substantiating data from the BVID devices were provided in several rejection decisions. This included various PSs across Bogovinje, Gostivar, Struga, Kichevo, Vrapchishte, Ohrid, Demir Hisar, Krushevo, Bitola, and Resen.

<sup>115</sup> Paragraph II.3.3.101 of the 2002 Venice Commission's Explanatory Report to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters recommends that results be invalidated if irregularities may have affected the outcome in one polling station, constituency or country, and requires that "in zones where the results have been annulled, the elections must be repeated".

## XVI. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations as contained throughout the text are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in North Macedonia and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past ODIHR recommendations that have not yet been addressed. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of North Macedonia to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.<sup>116</sup>

### A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Electoral Code should be comprehensively reviewed in order to eliminate inconsistencies, harmonize it with other relevant legislation, and to bring it in line with OSCE commitments, international obligations and good practice. Comprehensive rules for campaigning, including access to the media and campaign finance in presidential elections, should be established to ensure equitable opportunities for both presidential and parliamentary candidates. Any such legislative reform should be public, inclusive, and carried out sufficiently in advance of the next election.
2. To ensure the operational efficiency of the State Election Commission and the Municipal Election Commissions, the authorities should provide adequate, effective, and timely budget allocations to these bodies, including in non-election years when needed, to ensure adequate conditions for hiring sufficient qualified staff.
3. All relevant authorities, including law enforcement agencies, should make concerted efforts to monitor, identify, and investigate allegations of electoral violations such as vote-buying, pressure on voters, and the misuse of administrative resources. Such investigations should be conducted in a thorough, timely, and transparent manner. Voters should be systematically informed about mechanisms for reporting violations.
4. Relevant state and public institutions should take additional steps to enhance women's participation in the electoral process and political decision-making. Political parties should identify and address barriers to women's involvement in politics, including by conducting gender audits and reviewing and reforming intra-party practices that hinder their effective representation within party structures.
5. Consideration could be given to revising the system of funding of electoral campaigns, based on objective, clear and reasonable criteria. For presidential candidates, public funds could be allocated equally, while for parliamentary campaigns, allocation could be proportionally based on parties' election results. For the campaign activities of non-parliamentary and newly established parties, the allocation of public funding should be considered, potentially based on minimum thresholds of support.

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<sup>116</sup> The follow-up of prior recommendations is assessed by the ODIHR EOM as follows: recommendations 22 and 23 from the final report of the 2019 presidential election, and recommendations 10, 17, 19 and 26 from the final report of the 2021 local elections are fully implemented. Recommendations 3, 7, 9, 11 from the final report of the 2019 presidential election, recommendation 11 from the final report of the 2020 parliamentary elections, and recommendations 28 and 32 from the final report of the 2021 local elections are mostly implemented. Recommendations 4, 5, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 25 and 27 from the final report of the 2019 presidential election, recommendations 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 28 from the final report of the 2020 parliamentary elections, and recommendations 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 14, 16, 18 and 30 from the final report of the 2021 local elections are partially implemented. See also the ODIHR [Electoral Recommendations Database](#).

6. To ensure access to effective legal remedies, the legal framework should be reviewed to eliminate undue restrictions on voters' rights to lodge electoral complaints and appeals.
7. The SEC should take measures to lower the incidence of procedural inconsistencies during the vote count and arithmetic mistakes on results protocols, including by revising procedures and results protocols and by enhancing the training of election board members.

## **B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Electoral System and Legal Framework**

8. To guarantee the equality of the vote, the legislation should prescribe a clear and consistent methodology and rules for a periodic review of district boundaries by an independent body. The delineation of district boundaries should be conducted in a timely, transparent, impartial, and inclusive manner, well before the next election.

### **Election Administration**

9. To enhance the effectiveness of appointing Municipal Election Commissions and electoral boards, consideration should be given to updating and revising the database of civil and public servants and broadening the eligibility criteria to expand the pool of suitable appointees. To ensure the stability of these bodies, the legislation should establish a reasonable deadline for changes in their composition prior to election day.
10. All relevant actors should coordinate to ensure the independent participation of persons with various types of disabilities in the entire electoral process, in line with international standards and good practice, ensuring that the premises and layout of polling stations are independently accessible and that information about the electoral process is available in accessible formats.

### **Voter Registration**

11. To guarantee that all eligible citizens can effectively exercise their right to vote, authorities should take appropriate measures to ensure that all voters, including those without valid identification documents, are effectively included in the voter register. The Electoral Code should be amended to provide for updates to the voter register between the two rounds of the presidential election.
12. To enhance the accuracy of the voter register, adequate mechanisms for updating, harmonizing and cleaning the relevant state databases that serve as the basis for the register should be established. The authorities should facilitate the conduct of meaningful audits of the voter register and other pertinent databases.

### **Candidate Registration**

13. To further promote pluralism in candidate registration, the electoral legislation should be revised to provide the possibility for individual candidacies.
14. The requirement for prospective candidates to disclose their ethnic identity should be reconsidered.

## Election Campaign

15. The legislature should consider, in consultation with the media regulator and other stakeholders, steps to regulate campaign activities and political advertising in online media and social network portals, and their financing.

## Campaign Finance

16. To prevent avenues for *quid pro quo* transactions, legal provisions regarding donations to electoral campaigns should be revised to harmonize donation timelines with the campaign period and remove the possibility of donating after the elections.
17. All campaign finance reports should include information on contributions and expenses incurred, including those by political parties supporting presidential candidates. Reports should be submitted electronically in an easily searchable format and made public immediately upon submission. The deadlines for the submission and audit of final financial reports should be shortened to align with international good practice.
18. To enhance the transparency and effectiveness of campaign finance oversight, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption and the State Audit Office should be adequately resourced and possess the necessary technical expertise. These institutions should conduct effective scrutiny of campaign finance and give proper and timely consideration to all reports and complaints concerning alleged irregularities.

## Media

19. The practice of state funding being paid directly to media outlets could be reconsidered. If maintained, to increase accountability and transparency, the legislation should establish clear and objective criteria for the eligibility of online news portals for state reimbursement of paid political advertisements.
20. To ensure equitable access to resources and contribute to a higher quality and more diverse overall media environment, alternative funding methods for print, broadcast and online media outlets within a secure and transparent framework could be explored, based on inclusive consultations with all relevant stakeholders.

## Election Dispute Resolution

21. Consideration should be given to extending the deadlines for applications and decisions on electoral complaints and appeals to align with international good practice.
22. Greater access to legal remedies should be facilitated, such as through a fully functional online submission system. The election administration should thoroughly examine all complaints in a timely manner and adopt substantiated decisions, which should be published promptly.

## Election Days

23. To ensure the secrecy of the vote, legal criteria for establishing polling stations should be reviewed. In particular, polling stations with fewer than ten voters should be merged with nearby polling stations and their ballots cast together.

24. To prevent group voting and preserve free choice for each voter, the State Election Commission should enhance training sessions and voter education campaigns. Election officials should enforce effective procedural safeguards during voting, such as informing voters about the voting process and upholding rules for assisted voting to prevent group or family voting.

### **Post-Election Developments**

25. The rules in the Electoral Code for invalidating election results should be reviewed to ensure they are proportionate to the violations found. Invalidation should be considered only for serious violations that affect the results, and could be conditional on a defined threshold. For all invalidations, the law should require repeated voting.

## ANNEX I: FINAL ELECTION RESULTS

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION – FIRST ROUND<sup>117</sup>

Total number of registered voters	1,814,317
<i>Number of voters on the in-country voter lists</i>	1,713,758
<i>Number of voters on the list of voters temporarily residing abroad</i>	95,116
<i>Number of voters registered to vote abroad</i>	2,569
<i>Total number of voters registered for early voting</i>	9,809
Total number of votes cast ( <i>turnout</i> )	905,622 (49.92 per cent)
Number of valid votes	881,040
Number of invalid votes	24,560

Candidate (in order of appearance on the ballot)	Votes	Percentage <sup>118</sup>
Stevo Pendarovski (endorsed by SDSM-led coalition)	180,499	20.49
Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova (endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition)	363,085	41.21
Stevcho Jakimovski (endorsed by GROM-led coalition)	8,121	0.92
Bujar Osmani (endorsed by BDI/DUI-led coalition)	120,811	13.71
Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska (endorsed by <i>the Left</i> )	41,311	4.69
Arben Taravari (endorsed by VLEN/VREDI coalition)	83,337	9.46
Maksim Dimitrievski (endorsed by ZNAM – Movement for Our Macedonia)	83,855	9.52

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION – SECOND ROUND<sup>119</sup>

Total number of registered voters	1,814,317
<i>Total number of voters registered for early voting</i>	13,969
Total number of votes cast ( <i>turnout</i> )	861,211 (47.47 per cent)
Number of valid votes	812,899
Number of invalid votes	48,289

Candidate (in order of appearance on the ballot)	Votes	Percentage
Stevo Pendarovski (endorsed by SDSM-led coalition)	251,899	30.99
Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova (endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition)	561,000	69.01

<sup>117</sup> Based on the [Conclusion on Finality of the Results of the Election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 24 April, 2024 \(no. 09-1854/1\)](#), adopted by the SEC on 2 May 2024.

<sup>118</sup> All percentages of votes obtained are counted from the total of valid votes, while the SEC indicates percentages from all votes cast.

<sup>119</sup> Based on the [Conclusion on Finality of the Results of the Election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 8 May, 2024 \(no. 08-2163/1\)](#), adopted by the SEC on 11 May 2024.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION<sup>120</sup>

Total number of registered voters	1,815,350
<i>Number of voters on the in-country voter lists</i>	1,716,664
<i>Number of voters on the list of voters temporarily residing abroad</i>	96,010
<i>Total number of voters registered for early voting</i>	14,064
Total number of votes cast (turnout)	1,006,436 (55.44 per cent)
Number of valid votes	978,980
Number of invalid votes	27,451

Candidate list (in order of appearance on the ballot)	Votes	Percentage	Mandates
Coalition for European Future (SDSM-led coalition)	154,447	15.78	18
Coalition “Your Macedonia” VMRO-DMPNE	436,407	44.58	58
Coalition Bravely for Macedonia (GROM-led coalition)	4,522	0.46	--
Coalition “European Front” (BDI/DUI-led coalition)	137,690	14.07	18
Political Party <i>The Left</i>	68,637	7.01	6
Coalition VLEN	106,937	10.92	14
Movement ZNAM – For Our Macedonia	56,232	5.74	6
United Macedonia	1,688	0.17	--
Political Party New Alternative Skopje	3,515	0.36	--
Political Party AVAJA	2,908	0.30	--
European Citizen Movement	241	0.02	--
Macedonian Third Era – Macedonian Independent Lists Sovereignists	966	0.10	--
Your Party	1,794	0.18	--
Motherland Macedonia	1,099	0.11	--
Political Party <i>the Right</i>	535	0.05	--
Political Party Democrats	912	0.09	--
Workers’ Party	450	0.05	--

<sup>120</sup> Based on the [Conclusion on Finality of the Results and Distribution of Mandates Per Electoral District in the Elections of Members of Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 8 May, 2024](#) (no. 08-2677/1), adopted by the SEC on 18 May, 2024, [Conclusion on Publication of Final Results and Distribution of Mandates in the Electoral District no. 5 in the Elections of Members of Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 8 May, 2024, after Completion of the Process following Filed Complaints](#) (no. 08-2677/2), adopted by the SEC on 27 May, 2024, [Conclusion on Publication of Final Results and Distribution of Mandates in the Electoral District no. 6 in the Elections of Members of Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 8 May, 2024, after Completion of the Process following Filed Complaints](#) (no. 08-3081/1), adopted by the SEC on 30 May, 2024, and information available on the [SEC results website](#).

## ANNEX II: LIST OF OBSERVERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

### OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Samkharadze	Nikoloz	Special Co-ordinator	Georgia
Ödebrink	Carina	Head of Delegation	Sweden
Bushati	Helidon	MP	Albania
Goxheri	Bojan	Staff of Delegation	Albania
Gjiknuri	Damian	MP	Albania
Leti	Dorina	Staff of Delegation	Albania
Valikaj	Ermonela	MP	Albania
Gödl	Ernst	MP	Austria
Kassegger	Axel	MP	Austria
Scherak	Nikolaus	MP	Austria
Troch	Harald	MP	Austria
Groothedde	Celia	MP	Belgium
Kyriakou Hadjiyianni	Kyriakos	MP	Cyprus
Merkel	Radek	Staff of Delegation	Czech Republic
Václavec	Ladislav	MP	Czech Republic
Zeman	Jaroslav	MP	Czech Republic
Valentin	Kim	MP	Denmark
Hopsu	Inka	MP	Finland
Huru	Petri	MP	Finland
Koltchanov	Stéphanie	OSCE PA Secretariat	France
Portes	Thomas	MP	France
Kaufmann	Malte	MP	Germany
Keuter	Stefan	MP	Germany
Koci	Freyja	OSCE PA Secretariat	Germany
Mijatovic	Boris	MP	Germany
Schreider	Christian	MP	Germany
Antoniou	Maria	MP	Greece
Champouris	Georgios	Staff of Delegation	Greece
Karaoglou	Theodoros	MP	Greece
Alfieri	Alessandro	MP	Italy
Bilotti	Anna	MP	Italy
Onori	Federica	MP	Italy
Trezza	Giuseppe	Staff of Delegation	Italy
Baum	Gilles	MP	Luxembourg
Bisenius	Marie-Pia	Staff of Delegation	Luxembourg
Etgen	Fernand	MP	Luxembourg
Haagen	Claude	MP	Luxembourg
Dittrich	Boris	MP	Netherlands
Vogels	Henrica (Rian)	MP	Netherlands
Fageras	Mona Lil	MP	Norway
Mossleth	Siv	MP	Norway



Ness	Synnove	Staff of Delegation	Norway
Bierecki	Grzegorz	MP	Poland
Jarmuziewicz	Tadeusz	MP	Poland
Mykietynski	Marcin	Staff of Delegation	Poland
Pasławska	Urszula	MP	Poland
Graça Nunes	Luís	MP	Portugal
Barna	Ilie-Dan	MP	Romania
Boyarskaya	Daria	OSCE PA Secretariat	Russian Federation
Ivanishcheva	Anzhelika	OSCE PA Secretariat	Russian Federation
Abdili	Sherif	OSCE PA Secretariat	Serbia
Krajčí	Marek	MP	Slovakia
Rallo	Artemi Vicent	MP	Spain
Begic	Dennis	MP	Sweden
De Ciutiis	Simona	Staff of Delegation	Sweden
Demner	Jonathan	Staff of Delegation	Sweden
Hannah	Robert	MP	Sweden
Isaksson	Lars	MP	Sweden
Nicholson	Marie	MP	Sweden
Nilsson	Ulrik	MP	Sweden
Rodén	Jessica	MP	Sweden
Söder	Björn	MP	Sweden
Baybatur	Murat	MP	Türkiye
Dalkiliç	Halis	MP	Türkiye
Öztunç	Ali	MP	Türkiye
Uçar	Kamil	Staff of Delegation	Türkiye
Alieksieiev	Sergii	MP	Ukraine
Dubnov	Artem	MP	Ukraine
Gerashchenko	Iryna	MP	Ukraine
Huq	Rupa	MP	United Kingdom
Mills	Nigel	MP	United Kingdom
Mccuiston	Jennifer	Staff of Delegation	United States
Simrell	Shannon	Staff of Delegation	United States

### Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

Heer	Alfred	Head of Delegation	Switzerland
Gevorgyan	Armen	MP	Armenia
Buchmann	Christian	MP	Austria
Schennach	Stefan	MP	Austria
Borenovic	Branislav	MP	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ganoux	Florence	Venice Commission	France
Roller-Kaufman	Carine	PACE Secretariat	France
Tanguy	Liliana	MP	France
Janssen	Michael	Venice Commission	Germany
Stamatis	Georgios	MP	Greece
O'Reilly	Joseph	MP	Ireland

Billi	Simone	MP	Italy
Floridia	Aurora	MP	Italy
Turgunaliyev	Maksat	Accompanying Person	Kyrgyzstan
Said	Chris	MP	Malta
Blikra	Jone	MP	Norway
Libicki	Jan Philip	MP	Poland
Neagu	Denisa	MP	Romania
Torcătoriu	Bogdan	PACE Secretariat	Romania
Sánchez García	José María	MP	Spain
Arslan	Sibel	MP	Switzerland
Fridez	Pierre-Alain	MP	Switzerland
Akalin	Mehmet	MP	Türkiye
Celenk Ozen	Sevilay	MP	Türkiye

### European Parliament

López Gil	Leopoldo	Head of Delegation	Spain
Hesse	Martina	EP Policy Advisor	Belgium
Graser Lasic	Marina	EP Secretariat	Croatia
Douaud	Armelle	EP Secretariat	France
Berg	Lars Patrick	MEP	Germany
Castaldo	Fabio Massimo	MEP	Italy
Luise	Raffaele	EP Secretariat	Italy
Ormel	Henk Jan	MEP	Netherlands
Van Der Werff	Hugo Paul	EP Policy Advisor	Netherlands
Bilčík	Vladimír	MEP	Slovakia
Nart	Javier	MEP	Spain

### ODIHR EOM Short-term Observers

Bushati	Artur	Albania
Cici	Arben	Albania
Aschaber	Manfred	Austria
Bouacem	Benjamin	Austria
Doschek	Florian	Austria
Griessler	Christina Eva	Austria
Hagspiel	Hermann	Austria
Töglhofer	Theresia	Austria
Elleboudt	Adrien	Belgium
Saelman	Helena	Belgium
Thirion	Jérémy	Belgium
Van de Kauter	An	Belgium
Vranjes	Aleksandar	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Zubonja	Marijana	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ahuja	Harpreet	Canada
Banks-Demuth	Andrea	Canada

Hodgson	Barbara	Canada
Krawetz	Nicholas	Canada
Pedneault	Maxime	Canada
Tsao	Jonathan	Canada
Whittaker	Kateryna	Canada
Đevoić	Matko	Croatia
Geidt	Lenka	Czech Republic
Med	František	Czech Republic
Mítková	Veronika	Czech Republic
Pham	Bich Ngoc	Czech Republic
Dergam	Adriana	Czech Republic
Kazdová	Monika	Czech Republic
Němec	Jiří	Czech Republic
Schmiedová	Petra	Czech Republic
Bang	Hanne	Denmark
Holtze	Gert	Denmark
Kyrø	Øjvind	Denmark
Lauritsen	Poul	Denmark
Lind	Kirsten	Denmark
Moesby	Ole	Denmark
Petersen	Ingegerd	Denmark
Ravn	Peter	Denmark
Schmidt	Jan	Denmark
Maspanov	Marge	Estonia
Siplane	Andres	Estonia
Dorji	Ilona	Finland
Koisti	Timo	Finland
Oksanen	Tatu	Finland
Sykkö	Janne	Finland
Vesalainen	Maria	Finland
Aubert	Béatrice	France
Contamin	Bénédicte	France
Contensou	Clémence	France
Dardant	Philippe	France
de Leffe	Marie	France
Delumeau	Pascal	France
Jouannet	Marion	France
Palahouane	Emilie	France
Pellerin	Rémi	France
Picot	Christophe	France
Serafini	Claudio	France
Vazquez	Matthias	France
Yakhlaf-Lallemand	Nadia	France
Bobokhidze	Elene	Georgia
Kinkladze	Tatia	Georgia
Alck	Sabine	Germany

Aschmoneit	Walter	Germany
Bartels	David	Germany
Bess	Henning	Germany
Bloss	Lasia	Germany
Bosze	Izabella	Germany
Brand	Judith	Germany
Bronkal	Daniel	Germany
Brueser	Edgar	Germany
Buettner	Ingo	Germany
Bühlmeier	David	Germany
Burudshiew	Konstantin	Germany
Butter	Marius	Germany
Ehren	Ute	Germany
Freund	Hanns	Germany
Galla	Randolph	Germany
Hauter	Mario	Germany
Herkenhoff	Maria	Germany
Hueskes	Kathrin	Germany
Jung	Fabian	Germany
Kleffel	Rainer	Germany
Kohlmeier	Peter	Germany
Krech	Brigitte	Germany
Kunert	Andreas	Germany
Lingenthal	Dietrich	Germany
Loch	Alexander	Germany
Maiweg	Andrea	Germany
Menz	Beatrice	Germany
Neundorf	Ulrike	Germany
Neymeyer	Susanne	Germany
Nupnau	Ben	Germany
Pysarenko	Anna	Germany
Roeder	Mark	Germany
Rosendahl	Heinrich	Germany
Rumpf	Matthias	Germany
Schomaker	Katrin	Germany
Schulze	Claudia	Germany
Schuster	Martin	Germany
Tietz	Sarah	Germany
Veith	Christoph	Germany
Weber	Edith	Germany
Zweig	Richard	Germany
Fischer	Fischer	Germany
Diagouma	Maria	Greece
Gkatzaras	Vasileios	Greece
Kanakidis	Dimitrios	Greece
Kanellopoulou	Maria	Greece

Koltsida	Lamprini	Greece
Petropoulos	Eleftherios	Greece
Psiachas	Dimitrios	Greece
Yiannias	Nicholas	Greece
Baár	Gábor	Hungary
Baktai	Erik	Hungary
Gábríel	Győző	Hungary
Sveinsson	Gunnar	Iceland
Boyd	Deirdre	Ireland
Clay	Ian	Ireland
Coakley	John Paul	Ireland
Donnelly	Patricia	Ireland
Gogarty	Brendan	Ireland
Grange	Michael	Ireland
Greene	Sarah	Ireland
Kiernan	Maria	Ireland
Bartolomucci	Maria	Italy
Benvenuti	Lorenzo	Italy
Morini	Mara	Italy
Tardioli	Renata	Italy
Sacagiu	Vladimir	Moldova
Milović	Boško	Montenegro
Vuković-Simonović	Bosiljka	Montenegro
Bosch	Robert	Netherlands
Caspers	Cornelis	Netherlands
Dwinger	Sabine	Netherlands
Helle	Yvonne	Netherlands
Lund	Toril	Norway
Salvesen	Elisabeth	Norway
Seim	Øyvind	Norway
Svartefoss	Per	Norway
Quitério	Gonçalo	Portugal
Rego Henriques	Pedro	Portugal
Balan	Luminita	Romania
Nicolae	Georgeta-Ofelia	Romania
Popovici	Alexandru	Romania
Borjanić	Milica	Serbia
Stanković	Sanja	Serbia
Gorjup Krapše	Benjamin	Slovenia
Chalco Miranda	Carlos	Spain
Fontenla Pita-Baamonde	Alberto	Spain
González Maldonado	Raquel	Spain
López de Haro López	María	Spain
Nievergelt	Rafael	Spain
Rodríguez Díaz	Patricia	Spain
Torres-Lacasa	Jose-Antonio	Spain

Åkerblom	Catrine	Sweden
Bergknut	Knut	Sweden
Fenjan	Tamara	Sweden
Glans	Stig	Sweden
Haggren	Åke	Sweden
Hammar skjöld	Erik	Sweden
Karlsson	Tommy	Sweden
Lindblad	Linda	Sweden
Lundqvist	Björn	Sweden
Magnuson Buur	Stina	Sweden
Nareskog	Hans	Sweden
Nyman	Per-Olov	Sweden
Persson	Erik	Sweden
Petri	Lisa	Sweden
Prades Barcelo	Maximo Juan	Sweden
Stenvall	Anna	Sweden
Ströje Wilkens	Zackie Madeleine	Sweden
Sundberg	Inga	Sweden
Tallberg	Bo	Sweden
Tollemark	Lars	Sweden
Wällberg	Peter	Sweden
Wandler	Erik	Sweden
Chappuis Jensen	Fairlie	Switzerland
Comandini	Fabrizio	Switzerland
Estermann	Johanna	Switzerland
Michel	Matthias	Switzerland
Portmann	Hans-Peter	Switzerland
Ziegler	Stefan	Switzerland
Tsymbaliuk	Yevhenii	Ukraine
Adetona	Adebayo	United Kingdom
Battersby	Anna	United Kingdom
Campion	Sonali	United Kingdom
Congreve	Matthew	United Kingdom
Etim-Gorst	Teresa	United Kingdom
Goldsmith	Naomi	United Kingdom
Greider	Alice	United Kingdom
Numminen	Anttoni	United Kingdom
Pegler	Mark	United Kingdom
Sayer	James	United Kingdom
Scott	Gerard	United Kingdom
Tilley	Marc	United Kingdom
Usmani Martinez	Soraya	United Kingdom
Verjee	Aly	United Kingdom
Wynne	Janet	United Kingdom
Akoiwala	Jallah	United States
Alvarado	José	United States

Amador	Jorge	United States
Bailey-Daystar	Jacob	United States
Banu	Bogdan	United States
Bartos	Omar	United States
Beck	Christopher	United States
Blackburn	Elizabeth	United States
Brossart	Joseph	United States
Butz	Jennifer	United States
Cooper	Dawn	United States
Cooper	Susanne	United States
Crawford	Henry	United States
Dorovic	Asim	United States
Eleusizov	Aiesha	United States
Farley	Stephen	United States
Funcheon	Gloria	United States
Galt	Sarah	United States
Gillette	Connor	United States
Graham	Rebecca	United States
Hanna	Juliet	United States
Hawkins	David	United States
Henny	Laura	United States
Jacobs	Rachel	United States
Jahr	Nicholas	United States
Kalinich	Gail	United States
Kravette	Ronald	United States
Martin	Sara	United States
Mayer	Alexander	United States
McCormack	Meghan	United States
Mitchell	Kristina	United States
Mitchell	John	United States
Moran	Steven	United States
Morrison	Mark	United States
Nagle	Brooke	United States
Nash	Jessica	United States
Parkison	Kathy	United States
Perl	Margaret	United States
Pierce	William	United States
Pinkard	Octavius	United States
Pojman	Ruth	United States
Richards	Jacquelyn	United States
Schein	Deborah	United States
Scott	Victoria	United States
Shapiro	Steven	United States
Shieldhouse	Richard	United States
Smellie	Jordan	United States
Sowry	Jenny	United States

Stern	Cara	United States
Valdiosera	Rene	United States
Van Valkenburgh	Jack	United States
Villalba	Laura	United States
Wathen	Henry	United States
Waxman	Sharon	United States
Weiner	Lauren	United States
Westphal	Thomas	United States
Wilke	Sydnee	United States
Winter	John	United States

### **ODIHR EOM Long-term Observers**

Qorri	Iilir	Albania
Zimburg	Bernhard	Austria
Palmer	Curtis	Canada
Němec	Jan	Czech Republic
Thau-Knudsen	Erik	Denmark
Heinonen	Matti	Finland
Ohayon	Sabine	France
Amisulashvili	Valeri	Georgia
Wagner	Rebecca	Germany
Ioannou	Eleni	Greece
Arnadottir	Kristin	Iceland
Ó Sé	Brendán	Ireland
Aresi	Lucrezia	Italy
Bjelić	Maja	Montenegro
De Vries	Jeroen	Netherlands
Benjaminsen	Gunn	Norway
Hult	Jonas	Sweden
Gysin	Michelle	Switzerland
Reid	Kiron	United Kingdom
Slegers	Jake	United States

### **ODIHR EOM Core Team**

Stirk	Jillian	Canada	Head of Mission
Papikyan	Anna	Armenia	
Chaliadzinski	Aliaksandr	Belarus	
Kovalyova	Elena	Belarus	
Mašková	Marcela	Czech Republic	
Tittel	Silke	Germany	
Nagy	Marcell	Hungary	
Marron	Peter	Ireland	
Arcidiacono	Noemi	Italy	
Bader	Max	Netherlands	



Teule	Laurens	Netherlands
Grujić	Radivoje	Serbia
Stanojev	Ivana	Serbia
Roth	Andreas	Sweden
Juraqulov	Farrukh	Tajikistan
Bowers	Kyle	United States

## ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas, including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (<http://www.osce.org/odihr>).