

CSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Statement on the First Round of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Skopje, 17 October 1994

A delegation of the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly, at the invitation of the Assembly of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, visited FYROM from 13-17 October 1994 with the purpose of monitoring the first round of the presidential and parliamentary elections on the 16 October. The delegation was led by Mr. Javier Ruperez of Spain and consisted of Emil Kostadinov of Bulgaria, Vaclav Cundrle and Cestmire Hofhanzl of the Czech Republic, Zlatko Kramaric, Ivan Milas and Bozidar Petrac of Croatia, Rino Serri of Italy, Guikje Roethof of the Netherlands, Bjørn Hope Galtung and Grethe Fosli of Norway, Roberto Battelli of Slovenia, Vladimir Semago of Russia, and Munif Islamoglu and Cemal Oztaylan of Turkey. The delegation was assisted by advisors from Turkey, Ukraine and the United States.

The delegation had the opportunity to listen to the views expressed by members of the Assembly and Government of FYROM, representatives of major political parties, nationalities, the media, the CSCE Spillover Mission in Skopje, UNPROFOR, and members of the diplomatic corps. Members of the delegation also had the opportunity to travel around the country during election day. The delegation notes that, for the purpose of this work, it at all times enjoyed a total freedom of movement and activity. The assistance provided by the Assembly greatly facilitated its work, and the delegation wishes to express its thanks.

The delegation was pleased to note that the electoral campaign took place in a generally peaceful and orderly way, and hopes that Government, political parties and FYROM citizens at large will keep the same atmosphere during the days preceding the second and decisive round of the elections.

The delegation discussed the delicate issue of citizenship as it related to the elections. While it seems impossible to document how many people it might negatively affect on election day, the process of documenting citizenship seemed unduly slow and the law governing citizenship restrictive. The 15-year residency requirement was highlighted in this regard.

The delegation considers that the electoral system, based on an old law, could better respond to overall interest of the FYROM population were it now to incorporate a degree of proportionality, as desired by the majority of the political forces, in representation, or consists of electoral districts which would encompass roughly equal numbers of voters each.

The delegation felt that the media, in general, were open to all political parties to express their views freely. The delegation also concluded that the media were not restrictive, although accusations of bias could not be completely rejected.

The delegation concluded that the problems just mentioned with the election process were often greatly exaggerated by those complaining about them, and not necessarily the sole responsibility of the Government. In some cases, the political opposition contributed to these problems by opposing suggested improvements in the process and advocating more divisive measures. Furthermore, individuals must realize the need to make sure they are able to participate in the electoral process as provided by law. The delegation strongly believes that the success of an electoral process is heavily dependent on the cooperation of all segments of society.

On election day, members of the delegation visited more than 100 polling stations all over the country and found a number of irregularities, some potentially serious. The electoral lists were considered unreliable because they did not include a high number of people who had the right to vote. The fact that these people were generally able to vote by proving this right does not excuse the poor quality of the lists. The Government should urgently correct this situation. The delegation wishes also to point out that the so-called electoral invitations were distributed late or never at all, depriving citizens of convenient information.

The delegation cannot conclude that these irregularities were intended to serve the political interests of the parties in power, but, at this early stage, it is also impossible to measure the full impact of these irregularities on the degree to which the will of the voters was freely expressed. The delegation therefore stresses the importance of the second round of voting, scheduled for 30 October, and urges that the more blatant irregularities described be corrected by that time so that these elections could be considered adequately free and fair. The delegation hopes that the political parties and the voters alike will participate in the second round. It also stresses the vital importance of observers during the second round, both foreign and domestic.

The delegation, in stating its findings, reiterates the support of the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly for FYROM's full membership in the CSCE. Progress in the democratic development of the country can best be facilitated by its full integration into European and world affairs.

The delegation wishes to express, once again, its thanks for the assistance and hospitality of the Assembly and the people of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia during the course of its stay. It also thanks the CSCE Mission in Skopje for their logistical and substantive support.