



North Macedonia's elections were competitive and voters well informed, although the process remains insufficiently regulated: international observers

SKOPJE, 9 May 2024 – North Macedonia's presidential run-off and parliamentary elections were competitive and an extensive and pluralistic campaign helped voters to make an informed choice, but marred by negative rhetoric with nationalistic slogans, as well as shortcomings in the legislation and insufficient oversight of campaign finances, international observers said in a [statement](#) today.

The elections took place against a background of voter dissatisfaction with the political establishment, and a general sense that both the government and opposition lacked the will to address long-standing calls for comprehensive reforms. The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP) found that while the legal framework creates the basis for democratic elections, many gaps and inconsistencies remain, making further reform essential.

“Election day was calm and peaceful, proceeding in a constructive atmosphere, despite the strong political polarization and fragmentation in North Macedonia,” said Nikoloz Samkharadze, Special Coordinator and leader of the short-term observer mission. “It is my sincere hope for the people of this country that the newly elected leadership will effectively tackle the key challenges facing the nation, and bring North Macedonia ever closer to its declared goal of EU membership.”

The tone of campaigning, including online, became progressively negative ahead of the first round of the presidential election, and this did not improve during the presidential run-off and parliamentary campaigns. Allegations of vote buying increased before election day, involving all major political parties, which highlights the need for greater efforts to address these concerns.

The method for distributing state funds for campaigning and media time disadvantaged smaller parties and those without any representation in parliament. At the same time, the transparency and accountability of campaign finances were weakened by the minimal campaign finance reporting requirements, as well as the limited resources and capacities given to oversight bodies.

“North Macedonia has failed to implement a number of important recommendations made by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and ODIHR,” said Alfred Heer, who headed the PACE delegation. “Many voters who live abroad were unable to vote for an MP to represent them in parliament, and the 40 per cent voter turnout requirement for the second round of presidential elections also needs urgent reform to avoid the risk of cycles of failed elections.”

With the notable exception of one presidential candidate in the second round, observers noted that political parties featured few women speakers at campaign events, and parties appeared to make little effort to engage women voters. All registered candidate lists were in line with the law to have a minimum of 40 per cent representation of women. However, they were often placed in the lowest possible positions.

“North Macedonia has made progress in advancing gender equality in political and public life, as demonstrated in these elections in which women comprised 43 per cent of parliamentary candidates,” stressed Carina Ödebrink, who headed the OSCE PA delegation. “Nonetheless, continued political engagement and reforms are imperative to increase representation of women in elected and appointed positions, and to address the concerns and needs of women voters.”



Some 1.8 million citizens were registered to vote in yesterday's elections. Public confidence in the election administration was generally high, and training for election officials was comprehensive, although voter education remained limited. Election day was generally calm and observers assessed it positively overall. Voting procedures were largely respected, but in a number of cases election boards did not fully keep to procedures during the vote count.

"We would like to praise a job done by the very dedicated women and men of the electoral boards, who demonstrated how well trained they were," said Leopoldo Lopez Gil, head of the EP delegation. "They contributed to the orderly and calm running of the electoral process and set an example of civic engagement."

North Macedonia's media landscape is diverse and media freedom largely respected. Throughout the campaign period, media generally covered all candidates, with some channels favouring specific candidate lists. Televised debates helped inform voters ahead of election day. At the same time, the need for further reforms in the media sector was noted.

"These elections were competitive and well run, particularly given the challenge of organizing two different elections at the same time," said Jillian Stirk, who headed ODIHR's election observation mission. "But the negative rhetoric and increasingly nationalistic undertones of some parties and candidates was extremely worrying, and the campaign would have benefited from more detailed oversight. We hope that going forward, North Macedonia will continue to strengthen its democracy, and ODIHR remains ready to provide support for these efforts."

The international election observation to the second round of the presidential election and the parliamentary elections in North Macedonia totalled 344 observers from 42 countries, made up of 238 ODIHR-deployed experts, long-term, and short-term observers, 72 from the OSCE PA, 23 from PACE, and 11 from the EP.

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