

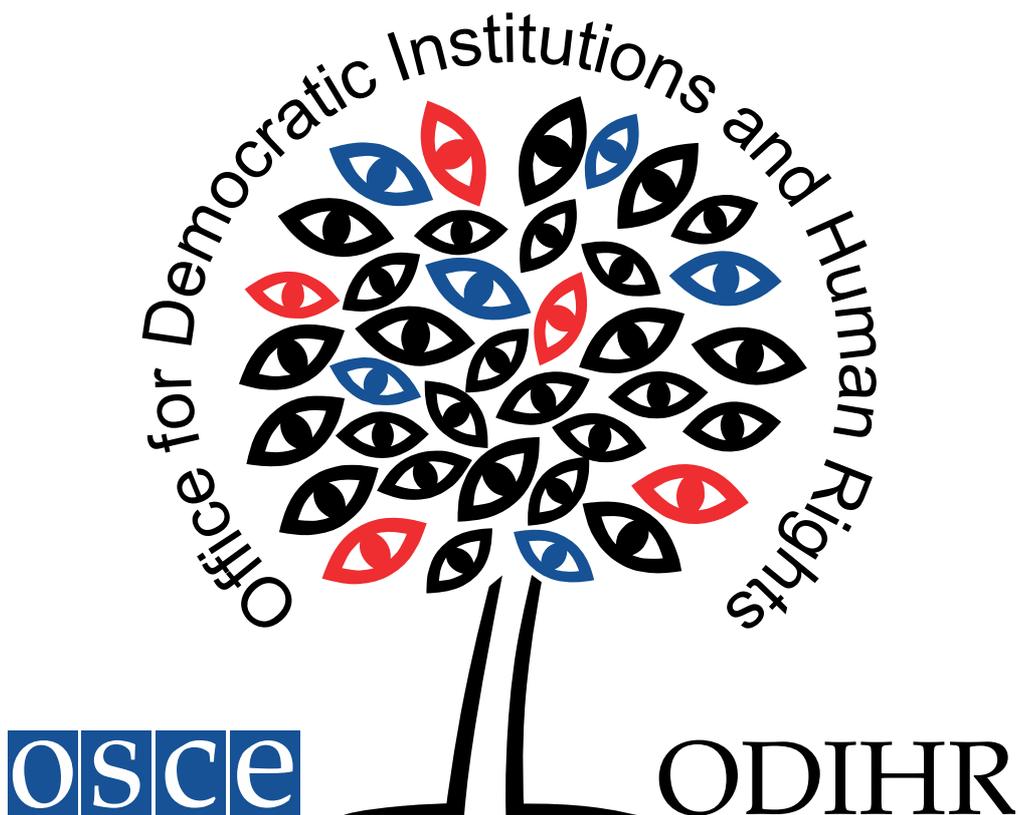


Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

LOCAL ELECTIONS
17 and 31 October 2021

ODIHR Election Observation Mission
Final Report



Warsaw
25 March 2022

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REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
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ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report¹

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an invitation by the authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia to observe the 17 October 2021 local elections and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 7 September to observe these elections. The ODIHR EOM assessed compliance of the election process with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and with national legislation.

In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions on the first round of the elections issued on 18 October, the ODIHR EOM concluded that the elections “were competitive and fundamental freedoms were widely respected, but numerous shortcomings in the legal framework underscore the need for a comprehensive reform. The leading parliamentary parties enjoy systemic advantages, particularly in the distribution of public resources for campaigning, including in the media. Candidates could campaign freely, but negative rhetoric, frequently targeting women, detracted from more issue-based debates. The election administration complied with most legal deadlines, but its ability to fulfill its mandate was strained by limited personnel and operational capacity. The late implementation of biometric voter identification created additional challenges in the administration of the elections. Election day, including the vote count, was assessed positively overall, despite frequent problems with the biometric devices, group voting, and some procedural errors during counting and tabulation. The publication of electoral information throughout the day, including preliminary results data for each polling station on election night, enhanced transparency”. The ODIHR EOM’s Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued on 1 November concluded that the second round “was characterized by a competitive campaign in which fundamental freedoms were respected, but negative rhetoric and reports of intimidation of contestants and pressure on voters potentially detracted from the process. The election administration made some efforts to address procedural shortcomings noted during the first round, and the second-round election day proceeded smoothly, although certain issues persisted and numerous shortcomings in the handling of complaints undermined effective remedy”.

The Constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms, and the Electoral Code serves as a technical basis for the conduct of all types of elections. Numerous gaps and inconsistencies in the electoral legal framework, including those caused by frequent and often unaligned changes, reduced legal certainty and negatively affected the smooth administration of the elections. The State Election Commission (SEC) adopted regulations to supplement the laws, but many contained inconsistencies and were only approved shortly before election day, exacerbating legal uncertainty. On 15 September, the parliament adopted a number of amendments to the Electoral Code applying to these elections, under an expedited procedure and without a public debate or consultation with key stakeholders, contrary to international good practice. These amendments partially addressed some prior ODIHR recommendations, such as on defining the term of the mandate of SEC members. However, other ODIHR recommendations, including those concerning a comprehensive revision of the electoral legal framework, remain unaddressed. Most interlocutors of the ODIHR EOM underlined that more comprehensive and consultative reforms remain necessary.

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

Local elections are held every four years to elect the councils and mayors of 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje. Councils are elected under a closed-list proportional system, while mayors are elected in majoritarian contests. If no mayoral candidate receives an absolute majority of votes cast in the first round, a second round takes place two weeks later, between the two candidates with the most votes. The requirement that one-third of registered voters must turn out in the first round for mayoral elections to be valid also applies to repeat elections, creating the potential for a series of failed elections.

In both rounds, the election administration complied with most legal deadlines, despite a tight timeframe to adapt to the latest amendments and other novelties. However, its operational capacity and ability to perform its mandate independently was strained by a lack of permanent personnel and vacancies in key positions. The SEC generally carried out its duties in a collegial manner and held regular open sessions, most of which were live-streamed online. However, some SEC sessions were not announced in advance, and not all decisions and instructions were published in a consistent and timely manner, detracting from the overall transparency of the process. While most Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and the Election Commission of the City of Skopje (ECCS) managed the technical and administrative preparations of the elections in an adequate manner, MECs and Election Boards (EBs) experienced considerable turnover among their members, which in some cases impeded their work.

Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed confidence in the accuracy and reliability of the voter register, although some recognized that a significant number of registered voters reside abroad. Citizens can be deprived of voting rights by a court decision on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability, which is inconsistent with international obligations and standards. Legal requirements for the SEC to maintain the voter register with direct data extraction from the central population register remain to be implemented in practice. Citizens could verify and request corrections to their voter registration data online and at SEC regional offices, but the verification process lacks adequate protections on personal data and inclusion in the lists is unnecessarily limited to citizens with a valid ID. Biometric voter identification was used for the first time in these elections, without any pilot project or comprehensive testing. The short timeframe for implementation impeded the SEC's ability to adopt in a timely manner relevant by-laws, procedures, trainings, and voter education. Still, most ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including political parties, welcomed the introduction of biometric voter identification as an effective means to prevent fraud, including multiple voting and voter impersonation.

The candidate registration process was generally inclusive. MECs and the ECCS registered a total of 299 mayoral candidates and 571 council lists with 10,649 candidates. Candidates could be nominated by political parties and coalitions of parties, or could run independently, supported by groups of voters; however, the inability to run individually for councilor challenges OSCE commitments. The numbers of supporting signatures required for independent candidatures exceeds 1 per cent in the majority of municipalities, at odds with international good practice. Persons whose legal capacity has been revoked on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability are denied the right to stand as candidates, contrary to international obligations.

The election campaign during both rounds was competitive, active and generally peaceful throughout the country. Although the campaign was affected by safety measures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamental rights and freedoms were respected, and contestants were generally able to campaign freely and convey their messages. However, negative rhetoric affected the campaign environment and detracted from more issue-based debates. Existing prohibitions on the use of administrative resources in the campaign were enhanced by the September 2021 amendments, but in the absence of systematic monitoring by relevant institutions, the effectiveness of these measures

remained in question. In both rounds, ODIHR EOM observers received persistent reports, some of which were documented, of pressure on voters, including public employees, to vote for certain contestants, as well as pressure on candidates. In the first round, the ODIHR EOM also noted isolated cases of intimidation of candidates and received allegations of pressure on candidates to withdraw. The ODIHR EOM also received allegations of vote-buying. While a few investigations of individual cases were initiated prior to both election days, political leaders generally did not react to these allegations or offer statements to deter such actions.

Overall, women were under-represented in the electoral process. The composition of election management bodies generally complied with the legal requirements for gender and ethnic representation, but only two of the seven SEC members are women. Women comprised some 45 per cent of all councilor candidates, in line with legal requirements for gender representation, and headed 111 lists, but only 8 per cent of mayoral candidates were women. In the absence of clear regulations on campaigning in social networks and effective moderation by parties and candidates of comments on their social media pages, many candidates, frequently women, were subjected to offensive language. Issues relating to gender equality and women's rights were largely absent from contestants' platforms and speeches, and women were under-represented in parties' campaigns.

Despite an overall comprehensive legal framework for campaign finance, some gaps and inconsistencies remain and recommendations of relevant institutions have not been introduced. Election campaigns could be funded from political parties' own funds and bank loans, as well as from donations. The law sets maximum amounts for donations and campaign expenditures and foresees sanctions for violations of campaign finance rules. However, contestants were not required to disclose all sources of income, or any expenditures, prior to the election days, contrary to international good practice. Although some contestants failed to submit any interim campaign finance reports, no sanctions were applied. Overall, limited public information on campaign income and insufficient oversight reduced transparency and undermined the detection and prevention of potential violations.

The ODIHR EOM media monitoring found that, overall, election-related coverage in each round was neutral in tone. During the official campaign period, the two largest parties dominated in the news programmes of monitored national broadcasters, with smaller parties and independent candidates receiving limited coverage in national media in both rounds. With fewer candidates in the second round, the monitored broadcasters provided voters with ample information about contestants. Despite prior ODIHR recommendations, the Electoral Code continues to prescribe the content of newscasts of the public broadcaster. Paid advertising in broadcast, print and online media during the campaign is funded directly and exclusively from the state budget, which was criticized by some interlocutors as encouraging clientelism. The inadequate regulation for distribution of these funds among contestants meant that in both rounds, the vast majority of airtime and state funds for media advertising were allocated to the largest parties. Although in line with the law, this significantly disadvantaged candidates of smaller parties and independents, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice.

The legislation for the resolution of electoral disputes contains numerous gaps and ambiguities which hamper the process, and new deadlines introduced by the most recent amendments to the Electoral Code created additional uncertainty. Previous ODIHR recommendations concerning the adjudication of election disputes remain unaddressed, including related to legal standing to file complaints. A general lack of understanding among MECs of procedures for handling complaints filed by voters led to inconsistent application. As a result, a number of such complaints were not addressed, depriving those voters of the opportunity to vote and undermining effective remedy. Multiple shortcomings in the handling of complaints at the SEC, including formalistic or inconsistent application of admissibility requirements and failure to publish decisions, undermined the right to effective redress

and reduced transparency. Despite the legal requirement for a public hearing, the Administrative Court handled most appeals without one, contrary to international obligations.

The Electoral Code provides for citizen and international observation and also entitles registered contestants to appoint their authorized representatives to follow the entire election process, contributing to the transparency of the election process. Capacity and interest among civil society organizations to observe was limited in these elections. In total for both rounds, the SEC accredited 7 citizen observer organizations with a total of 1,210 observers, as well as 2 international organizations and 19 diplomatic and foreign delegations. In an inclusive manner, the SEC extended the observer accreditation period for all organizations wishing to observe the second round, and accreditations issued in the first round remained valid. Despite repeated appeals by the SEC, obstacles for some observers and journalists in a few polling stations persisted.

The first-round election day on 17 October was generally peaceful, with a voter turnout of 51.4 per cent announced by the SEC. ODIHR EOM observers positively assessed the opening and voting processes in observed polling stations, but noted frequent problems with the biometric identification devices, in particular widespread failure of the devices to successfully scan voters' fingerprints. While voting procedures were generally respected, as were COVID-19 protection measures, ODIHR EOM observers noted problems with voter secrecy as well as widespread group voting, which negatively impacts women's participation. The vote count was assessed positively in a large majority of polling stations where it was observed, but ODIHR EOM observers reported that many EBs failed to follow established procedures and had difficulties completing the results protocols. While ODIHR EOM observers assessed that the determination of ballot validity had been generally reasonable and consistent, significant numbers of invalid ballots were noted throughout the country. The tabulation process was assessed negatively in many reports submitted by ODIHR EOM observers, mainly due to inadequate conditions and poor organization.

In line with ODIHR methodology in the absence of short-term observers for the second round, the ODIHR EOM did not observe election-day proceedings on 31 October in a systematic or comprehensive manner, but mission members visited a limited number of polling stations. The voting process in visited polling stations was assessed as well-organized, transparent and calm, although isolated incidents were reported by the authorities. While established procedures were largely followed, some issues noted in the first round persisted, including technical challenges with the biometric identification of voters. The few vote counts observed were mostly transparent, but respect for established procedures varied considerably. The SEC announced that voter turnout was 49.65 per cent and started posting preliminary results shortly after the close of polls, enhancing transparency.

This report offers a number of recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in North Macedonia closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations relate to the legal framework, the election administration, suffrage rights, voter registration, pressure on voters and state and public employees, campaign finance, the adjudication of electoral disputes, and the media. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following an invitation by the authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia to observe the 17 October 2021 local elections and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 7 September. The mission, led by Tana de Zulueta, consisted of a 16-member core team based in Skopje

and 20 long-term observers (LTOs) deployed on 15 September to 9 locations around the country. On the first-round election day on 17 October, 165 observers from 29 countries were deployed by the ODIHR EOM. Women constituted 48 per cent of ODIHR observers deployed in the first round. For the second round on 31 October, 13 core team members and 10 LTOs remained in country. ODIHR observers for the second round came from 13 countries. Fifteen of ODIHR observers in the second round were women. The ODIHR EOM remained in the country until 3 November.

The ODIHR EOM assessed the compliance of the election processes with OSCE commitments and other standards for democratic elections, as well as domestic legislation. This final report follows two Statements of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, which were released on 18 October and 1 November 2021.²

The ODIHR EOM wishes to thank the authorities 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 and co-operation. It also expresses its appreciation to other national and local state institutions, political parties and coalitions, candidates, civil society, media, international community representatives, and other interlocutors for sharing their views and for their co-operation.

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

On 6 August 2021, the speaker of parliament called local elections for 17 October. The previous local elections took place in 2017, when the electoral coalition led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), which had formed a government following the December 2016 early parliamentary elections, gained control of the majority of municipalities.³ The government, headed by SDSM president, Zoran Zaev, was supported by a coalition of the SDSM, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and several smaller political parties.⁴

Women are underrepresented in public office, holding 45 of the 120 seats (37.5 per cent) in the current parliament and 4 of the 15 ministerial posts in the government. In the 2017 local elections, women were elected to only 6 of 81 mayoral positions and accounted for 455 of 1,388 elected councilors (33.7 per cent).

In the period leading up to these elections, issues of national and international policy dominated public debate and were ultimately reflected in the local election campaigns. These included the country's aspirations for European Union (EU) membership and ongoing delays in accession talks, disagreements over the management of the COVID-19 pandemic by the government, and the economic situation, particularly the high unemployment and emigration rates. A population census, the first since 2002, was conducted between 5 and 30 September, amid calls to prolong the survey period and claims from opposition parties that the methodology was flawed.⁵

² See previous [ODIHR election reports on North Macedonia](#). ODIHR has endorsed the [2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation](#).

³ Following the 2017 local elections, out of 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje, SDSM held 57 mayorships, the ethnic-Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) - 10, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) - 5, and the Alliance of Albanians (AA) - 3, while 3 mayors were independent. The Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), the ethnic-Albanian Movement BESA (BESA), and the Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia (DPTM) each held one mayoral position.

⁴ The government also included one minister each from BESA and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The SDSM-led coalition that won the 2020 early parliamentary elections included 20 smaller parties.

⁵ For example, the AA and Levica parties criticized the methodology and asked for the census to be extended, claiming that not all citizens were included.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Local elections are primarily regulated by the 1991 Constitution, the 2006 Electoral Code, and other relevant acts, including the 2004 Law on Financing of Political Parties, the 2019 Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests, the 2013 Law on Media, and the 2013 Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services. North Macedonia has ratified key international human rights instruments pertaining to the holding of democratic elections.⁶

The Constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms, and the Electoral Code serves as a technical basis for the conduct of all types of elections. Numerous gaps and inconsistencies in the Electoral Code, including those caused by frequent and often unaligned changes, reduced legal certainty and negatively affected the smooth administration of these elections. The SEC adopted regulations to supplement existing laws, but many of these regulations contained inconsistencies and were approved only shortly before election day, further exacerbating legal uncertainty.

The Electoral Code has been amended substantially since the previous local elections, including twice in 2021.⁷ In a snap session on 15 September, contrary to international good practice, the parliament adopted a number of amendments applying to these local elections.⁸ These amendments *inter alia* defined the term of mandate of SEC members, provided for the withdrawal of candidate lists within 48 hours from registration, and stipulated responsibility of participants in the campaign for the content of campaign advertisements, addressing some prior ODIHR recommendations. The amendments also regulated some aspects of election procedures during a pandemic, as well as the use of public vehicles during the election period, and shortened the deadline for the submission of final campaign finance reports. Despite frequent changes to the Electoral Code, a number of ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those concerning a comprehensive revision of the electoral legal framework.⁹

The 15 September amendments were adopted under an expedited procedure without prior public debate and without the consultation of key stakeholders, including relevant state institutions, who raised concerns to the ODIHR EOM about the hasty adoption of important changes and the technical capacity to implement them in the limited time available before election day.¹⁰ While an inter-agency working group composed of representatives from political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), the expert community and international organizations was convened in January by the Ministry of Justice to propose amendments to the Electoral Code, the ODIHR EOM was informed that political

⁶ Including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 2003 UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). North Macedonia is a member of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

⁷ On 2 April, amendments were passed to supplement provisions on biometric voter identification. Previously, changes to the Electoral Code were introduced in February 2020, affecting most electoral procedures and key responsibilities of the election administration. The Code was also amended in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

⁸ Section 5 of the Venice Commission's [2005 Interpretative Declaration on the Stability of the Electoral Law](#) provides that "any reform of electoral legislation to be applied during an election should occur early enough for it to be really applicable to the election".

⁹ While the parliament announced that the September 2021 amendments stem from previous ODIHR recommendations, the ODIHR EOM was informed that a comprehensive electoral reform is scheduled for after the 2021 local elections to implement, *inter alia*, ODIHR recommendations that remain unaddressed.

¹⁰ The amendments were submitted by members of six parliamentary groups, representing both government and opposition, and adopted by a near-unanimous vote (78 votes for, 2 against, and 1 abstention).

parties were overall reluctant to contribute to its work and that many suggestions by the working group have been left unattended by the parliament.¹¹

The legal framework should be comprehensibly revised to address all outstanding ODIHR recommendations and to eliminate the numerous existing gaps and inconsistencies. The parliament should undertake this revision well before the next elections, following an open and inclusive consultation process in which the proposals by all stakeholders are given meaningful consideration.

Local elections are held every four years to elect the councils and mayors of 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje. Municipal councils are elected under a closed-list proportional system without a threshold. The number of councilors in each municipality ranges from 9 to 33, depending on the size of the population.¹²

Mayors are elected in majoritarian contests. To be elected in the first round, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes cast. Otherwise, a second round takes place two weeks later, between the two candidates with the most votes. One-third of registered voters must turn out for a mayoral election to be valid in the first round. If the required threshold is not reached, the election must be repeated; however, the Electoral Code does not specify when the repeat voting must take place.¹³ Repeat elections are subject to the same turnout requirement, creating the potential for cycles of failed elections.

The law should stipulate a clear timeframe for the holding of repeat elections in cases where the turnout requirement was not met in the first round of a mayoral election. To reduce the risk of failed elections, the voter turnout requirement for repeat elections could be reconsidered.

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The local elections were administered by a three-tiered structure led by the SEC and comprising 80 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and the Election Commission of the City of Skopje (ECCS), 3,384 Election Boards (EBs), as well as 88 special Election Boards established to manage early voting for COVID-19 positive voters and those in self-isolation.¹⁴ Second-round mayoral contests were conducted under the administration of 50 MECs and the ECCS, 2,394 EBs, and 42 special EBs.

The SEC is a permanent body and the highest electoral authority with regulatory, monitoring and oversight powers. It is composed of seven members who are elected by parliament.¹⁵ The SEC in its current composition was appointed in January 2021 for a maximum term of two years. The 15 September amendments defined and extended the term of office of the SEC to five years, addressing previous ODIHR recommendations. For administrative and organizational matters, the SEC is

¹¹ The working group was established in 2015 and reinstated following a July 2016 agreement between four political parties and conducted its activities under the co-ordination of the Ministry of Justice.

¹² The Council of the City of Skopje has 45 members. Council seats are allocated using the *d'Hondt* formula.

¹³ The mayoral elections were declared invalid in the municipalities of Centar Zhupa and of Mavrovo and Rostusha, where 25.78 and 32.00 per cent of voters turned out in the first round, respectively.

¹⁴ On 30 September, the SEC adopted a decision regarding 96 polling stations which have fewer than the minimum number of 10 registered voters required for establishing a polling station and which, therefore, did not open on election day. Voters assigned to these polling stations could vote in the nearest polling station.

¹⁵ Following an open recruitment process, four members, including the vice-president, are proposed by the ruling parties, and three members, including the president, by the opposition parties, from a list of applicants. The September 2021 amendments stipulate that in case of a change of government, the composition of the SEC shall be adjusted and a new secretary general shall be appointed.

assisted by a professional service, led by a secretary general. Throughout the country, the SEC is supported by 34 permanent regional offices.¹⁶

Despite a tight timeframe to adapt to the latest amendments and limited time in the run-up to the second round, election administration bodies complied with most legal deadlines in both rounds. However, the operational capacity of the election administration and its ability to fulfill its mandate independently was strained by a longstanding lack of permanent personnel. ODIHR previously criticized the insufficient capacity of its IT and legal sections. The overall organizational capacity of the SEC and its administrative structures was further exacerbated by the prolonged absence of a secretary general.¹⁷ The SEC informed the ODIHR EOM that administrative and budgetary constraints encroaching on employment in the SEC curtail the commission's ability to ensure adequate staffing levels and could eventually result in the closure of several SEC regional offices.

To ensure the operational independence and efficiency of the State Election Commission, the authorities should guarantee that it receives an adequate and timely budget allocation. The capacities of the Commission's personnel should match the responsibilities vested in the Commission under the Electoral Code, with essential staff employed on a permanent basis.

The current MECs and the ECCS, as well as the non-party members of EBs, were appointed in June and July 2021, respectively, for terms of five and four years.¹⁸ MECs supervised the administration of elections in the respective municipality, registered candidates, appointed EBs, and managed other technical preparations. Since their initial appointment, the composition of MECs and EBs was affected by considerable turnover among selected members, which, in some cases, impeded the operability of MECs during the electoral preparations. A significant number of replacements occurred shortly before the first election day, during ongoing trainings or after their completion, diminishing the trainings' value and impact. While the composition of the majority of lower-level election bodies remained largely unchanged for the second round, the SEC dismissed two EBs in their entirety, as well as some members of the Debar MEC, due to procedural shortcomings which led to the annulment of the election results of the respective polling stations.¹⁹ The process of selecting substitutes was hampered by an outdated database of public-sector employees, maintained by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration on the basis of data provided by other state and public institutions, which contains records of ineligible categories of state and public employees, as well as data of individuals who are no longer employed in the public sector.

As previously recommended, the database of state and public employees used for the selection of election officials should be updated, in order to ensure a smooth and efficient selection process. The pool of institutions from which employees are called to serve on election bodies could be revised.

¹⁶ Main competencies of the SEC regional offices pertain to the identification and inspection of polling station premises, the updating of voter lists, and the administration of the collection of supporting signatures for candidate nomination.

¹⁷ The mandate of the previous secretary general expired in January 2021 and the position has since been vacant.

¹⁸ MECs and the ECCS are composed of five members and their deputies, randomly selected by the SEC from among employees of the state and municipal administrations. EBs comprise three members and their deputies, randomly selected by MECs from among public and civil servants, and two temporary members and their deputies nominated for each election by parliamentary parties. The special EBs comprised three healthcare workers and two political party representatives. The two ruling and two opposition parties which received the highest number of votes in the last parliamentary elections nominate one member and deputy each.

¹⁹ In polling station 0543 in Debar, where 172 voters (some 22 per cent of the total number of voters registered in the polling station) were not recognized by the biometric voter identification device, neither the EB members, except for the deputy president, nor the MEC members signed the protocol, thus rendering the results protocol invalid. In polling station 2957/1 in the Skopje municipality of Shuto Orizari, a significant number of ballots were invalidated because they had not been stamped with the official EB stamp prior to being issued to voters.

The composition of election management bodies complied with the legal requirements for gender and ethnic representation.²⁰ While women were well-represented in lower-level election bodies, accounting for 49 per cent of MEC and ECCS members and presiding over 39 mid-level commissions, only 2 of the 7 SEC members, including the vice-president, are women, which falls short of the required quota. The SEC did not publish gender-disaggregated data on the composition of EBs. On the first-round election day, women presided over 55 per cent of EBs in the polling stations visited by ODIHR EOM observers.

The SEC generally carried out its duties in a collegial manner; however, the collegiality of the commission's work was at times undermined by a lack of internal co-ordination and information sharing, which primarily manifested itself in the run-up to the second round. Contrary to requirements in the Electoral Code, requests submitted by a SEC member after the first round to review the entire election material of a polling station where voting had been annulled and to conduct a thorough comparison of collected voters' fingerprints in the printed as well as electronic voter lists was not considered.

During the electoral period, the SEC held regular public sessions, which were open to the media, observers, and authorized candidate representatives and which were live-streamed online, with recordings also made available on the SEC's YouTube channel.²¹ Sessions were announced only via an official mailing list, often at very short notice. After the first round, some sessions, including those on the announcement of the final results of the first round and on modifications of some election procedures ahead of the second round, were not publicly announced. While brief information on most sessions was published on the SEC website, not all decisions and instructions were published online in a consistent and timely manner, including the SEC's budget and procurement plan, official information on the budget allocated for the campaign in the media, and adequate information on decisions taken between late September and the end of the electoral period, thus reducing the transparency of the SEC's work and its accountability for the management of the electoral process.

The public display of MEC decisions was not consistent, with some commissions using the municipality communication means and others solely submitting the decisions to the SEC which, however, did not publish them. In addition, the lack of transparency of the procurement process of the integrated biometric voter identification system is contrary to the principles of the Law on Public Procurement and did not allow for an assessment of the integrity of the process.²² Several interlocutors, including within the SEC, expressed concerns in this respect.

To enhance transparency and public confidence in their work and in the electoral process, the State Election Commission and Municipal Election Commissions should publish all relevant documentation, including budgets, procurement plans, and all regulations and decisions, in a consistent and timely manner.

The latest amendments to the Electoral Code as well as the late delivery of the new biometric voter identification devices (BVIDs) delayed the first-round technical and administrative preparations of the elections and necessitated last-minute adjustments of SEC instructions, training and educational programmes, as well as election-day materials and procedures. Changes adopted in the course of

²⁰ Each gender shall be represented by at least 30 per cent of members, and all ethnicities which comprise at least 20 per cent of the respective municipal population should be represented.

²¹ Due to technical problems with live-streaming at the SEC after the first round, the recordings of two out of six SEC sessions were available only on the website of the Media Information Agency.

²² The SEC did not publish the list and details of the bids received for the two tenders, the four amendments made to the second tender, the decision to select the operator, and information on the two companies subcontracted within the framework of the contract. Decisions and the overall procurement plan should have been published by the SEC in accordance with the principles of transparency of Article 6 of the Law on Public Procurement.

the electoral period posed serious challenges for the election preparations and, at times, resulted in inconsistent and belated instructions given to lower-level election bodies.

Some procedures and election materials were further modified after the first round, in view of widespread procedural shortcomings and the high incidence of results protocols requiring correction in the first round, which was indicative of insufficient understanding of the procedures among election officials.²³ Referring to a decision of the Administrative Court on the annulment of the first-round of voting in one polling station in Shuto Orizari, the SEC on 26 October decided to amend its instruction concerning ballot validity to the effect that ballots without an official stamp would not be considered invalid in the second round, thus removing an important procedural safeguard to ensure the integrity of the ballot. The decision was reversed the following day, despite the SEC emphasizing that the requirement of stamping of the ballots had never been challenged.

In most MECs observed by the ODIHR EOM and in the ECCS, technical and administrative preparations for both rounds were managed adequately. Some MECs informed the ODIHR EOM of inadequate material and financial resources before the first round, due to a lack of budget allocation or the late transfer of funds from municipalities. Financial resources for twelve MECs in municipalities with frozen municipal accounts were provided by the SEC only shortly before the first election day.²⁴ Given the prominent role of MECs and the ECCS in the local elections, the SEC appointed several employees of its professional service to co-ordinate their work and the exchange of information. However, some MECs opined that the communication from the part of the SEC was at times not satisfactory, with instructions often being delivered late in the process and not always providing sufficient guidance. MECs administering larger municipalities with significant numbers of voters and polling stations pointed out the disproportionate workload imposed on them, considering that they had the same human resources as MECs in small municipalities with fewer voters and polling stations.

The authorities should ensure adequate and timely allocation and distribution of financial and operational support to Municipal Election Commissions well ahead of election day. Communication and instructions from the State Election Commission to lower-level election bodies should be sufficiently complete and timely, in order to ensure due co-ordination and unified implementation of procedures.

The SEC developed and launched, well ahead of election day, a comprehensive training programme for lower election bodies and SEC-certified trainers. However, changes to the training curricula, which were required in order to include revised and newly introduced procedures and to reflect continued adjustments of the BVID software, negatively affected the comprehensiveness and clarity of the initial trainings.²⁵ Training manuals were available only shortly before the first election day. In the run-up to the second election day, refresher trainings for MECs and for EB presidents and their deputies were organized to address procedural shortcomings noted in the first round. The trainings

²³ For the runoff, the SEC modified the templates of the results protocols, removing an erroneous control formula and adding explanations for certain items. However, this adjustment did not fully address the issues encountered by MECs on the first-round election day. This was primarily because the SEC's application for the electronic transmission of results was not adjusted to allow MECs to update the total number of registered voters if individuals were added to the voter list on election day on the basis of an admitted complaint. Furthermore, applicable procedures for voter identification and for the packing of election materials were updated before the second-round election day.

²⁴ According to the information provided by the SEC, these were the MECs in Cheshinovo-Obleshevo, Delchevo, Demir Kapija, Karposh, Krivogashtani, Ohrid, Pehchevo, Resen, Struga, Tetovo, Vasilevo, and Zmovci.

²⁵ Additional trainings on how to operate the BVIDs were delivered from 12 to 15 October. The methodology of these trainings was generally assessed negatively by ODIHR EOM observers, with many EB members appearing to lack confidence in how to use the devices. The second-round trainings allowed SEC trainers to effectively build on experiences with new voter identification procedures, improving the clarity of the trainings delivered.

focused on voting procedures, operational instructions for the BVIDs, and the completion of results protocols. Training sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM before both rounds were interactive, informative and well-organized, providing election officials with the opportunity to raise queries and clarify doubts on election procedures.²⁶

The voter education conducted by the SEC for both rounds was low-key and started late, some two weeks before election day. It relied primarily on the SEC social network platforms and, closer to election day, short spots in broadcast and online media. The scope of the information campaign, however, remained limited, and lacked sufficient information on some critical aspects, such as new voter identification and registration procedures, and the processing of voters' personal data.²⁷

ODIHR EOM interlocutors from organizations representing the interests of persons with disabilities pointed out the long-standing issue of lack of access to the electoral process for persons with various types of disabilities, despite several initiatives undertaken by the election administration in cooperation with such organizations, due to barriers to physical access to most election administration premises and polling stations, as well as societal obstacles. Significant improvements for the benefit of the autonomous participation of persons with disabilities would require thorough co-ordinated efforts by various state and municipal authorities.

In a co-ordinated effort, state and local authorities as well as other actors involved in the election process should undertake further measures to ensure independent access of persons with various types of disabilities to the entire election process.

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

The Constitution grants all citizens who are at least 18 years old on election day the right to vote, except those deprived of legal capacity by a court decision.²⁸ Due to their late adoption, the September 2021 amendments to the Electoral Code removing the blanket restriction on voting rights on the basis of legal incapacity due to intellectual or psychosocial disability had no effect for these elections. The new provision does not address past ODIHR recommendations that all restrictions on electoral rights on the basis of disability be removed and remains inconsistent with international obligations and standards.²⁹

As previously recommended, the legal framework should be harmonized with the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by removing all restrictions on electoral rights on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability.

There is no consolidated legal framework for voter registration, and gaps in the Electoral Code are addressed by two rulebooks and several SEC instructions. To be included in the voter register, citizens must have a registered address in the country and a valid ID card or passport. While the law allows

²⁶ Some MECs and the ECCS told ODIHR EOM observers that they would have benefitted from additional training, given a lack of experience of some of their members, the introduction of new procedures, and the complexity of the candidate registration process.

²⁷ Voter education materials were available in the Macedonian and Albanian languages, supported by sign language and sometimes with subtitles in additional languages. The media campaign was supplemented by an informational tour of a minivan around the country.

²⁸ According to the SEC, some 450 persons are deprived of voting rights on this basis.

²⁹ See Articles 12 and 29 of the [2006 CRPD](#). See also paragraph 9.4 of the [2013 CRPD Committee Communication 4/2011](#), which states that “Article 29 does not foresee any reasonable restriction, nor does it allow any exemption for any group of persons with disabilities. Therefore, 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, within the meaning of article 2 of the Convention”.

citizens whose ID expired after the announcement of the elections to be included in the voter register, inclusion in the voter lists is contingent on the request of a new ID during the public inspection period.³⁰ Citizens whose IDs expired before the announcement of the elections remain excluded.³¹ The SEC developed a procedure whereby eligible voters could be added manually to voter lists on election day on the basis of an admitted complaint but did not publish information on the scope and location of changes to the voter lists, contrary to international good practice.³² Given that the law prohibits the updating of voter lists between the two rounds, this new procedure allowed those who turned 18 during this period and who possess a valid ID to actively register. Non-inclusion in the voter register and voter lists due to lack of a valid ID document creates an unnecessary burden for the election administration and for citizens who are otherwise eligible to vote.

The regulatory framework for voter registration procedures should be consolidated and harmonized to eliminate inconsistencies.

The authorities should take the appropriate measures necessary to ensure that all eligible voters are included in the voter register and the voter lists. The Electoral Code should be amended accordingly, including by removing restrictions based on expired identification documents, and by clarifying procedures for the inclusion in voter lists of persons who turn 18 between rounds.

While by law the SEC is responsible for maintaining and updating the voter register based on data extracted from the National Population Register, in practice, the State Statistical Office (SSO) ensures the technical and methodological processing of voter register data on the basis of updates provided by state institutions.³³ According to the SEC's IT Action Plan, finalization of the Voter Management Information System (VMIS) necessary to take over responsibilities from the SSO was expected in 2021, and integration with the National Population Register by 2022.³⁴

Citizens could verify their data online and at SEC regional offices throughout the year, as well as during a public inspection period, from 21 August to 9 September.³⁵ No measures were introduced to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to their voter registration records, either online or in person. The possibility to check voters' data by searching their name or address of residence, as well as the lack of technical safeguards to prevent misuse of the data contained in the electronic copy of the voter register and final voter lists that were provided to contesting parties, are contrary to national

³⁰ According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), only 5 out of 3,456 adult citizens whose ID expired after the announcement of the elections requested a new ID in time to be included in the voter lists.

³¹ According to the MoIA, the identity documents of 103,868 adult citizens expired before the announcement of the elections, and as a result, these citizens were excluded from the voter register.

³² On election day while polling is ongoing, eligible voters could submit to the EB a decision from the respective MEC or the Administrative Court for inclusion on the voter list. This decision could be obtained on the basis of a valid ID. Section I.1.2.iii of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that "electoral registers must be published".

³³ Including the MoIA, the Office for Birth, Marriage and Death, and basic courts, who provide updates on a quarterly basis. While the Electoral Code requires that voters' data be extracted from the National Population Register, various institutions that provide daily updates to the National Population Register must also submit data directly to the SEC.

³⁴ The SEC plans to compare the MoIA and National Population Register databases to assess their respective impact on the VMIS' allocation of voters to polling stations, but this timeline is not specified in the SEC IT Action Plan. Currently, the SEC and the MoIA are not registered data users with the National Population Register. The SEC held a meeting in March 2022 with the Ministry of Justice related to further cooperation in ensuring the interoperability of data with judicial bodies and state institutions.

³⁵ Citizens can request corrections at SEC regional offices, as well as online during the public inspection period.

legislation and international standards on data protection.³⁶ On 24 September, the SEC closed the voter register with a total of 1,824,864 voters, including 82,461 voters registered as being temporarily abroad, who can vote in-country but appear on separate voter lists.³⁷ The SEC published voter registration data only after the closing of the voter register, disaggregated by municipality but not by polling station or gender.

To ensure meaningful access to and transparency of the voter register and voter lists, the SEC should publish voter registration data disaggregated by polling station, periodically and before and after each election, while limiting the type of voters' personal data made publicly available and introducing technical safeguards to prevent its unauthorized processing.

Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed confidence in the accuracy and reliability of the voter register, although some recognized that a significant number of citizens residing abroad remain in the register as they maintain an official residence in-country. Even though the SEC's last random checks for accuracy of the voter register were conducted in 2016, none of the ODIHR EOM interlocutors suggested that an audit was needed. Institutional representatives met by the ODIHR EOM noted a lack of systematic reporting on deaths by hospitals and on name changes by the courts, as well as the absence of a central address register and the lack of co-operation of municipalities in addressing inconsistencies in citizens' addresses. Long-standing discrepancies and paper-based transfer of records between different databases remain to be addressed.³⁸ ODIHR has previously recommended that the interoperability database of the National Population Register could contribute to updating and harmonizing the data submitted to the voter register, as envisaged by the Electoral Code.

The accuracy of the voter register should be reinforced through systematic and electronic data updates, including for deaths and name changes, and the implementation of a co-ordinated nationwide system for the standardization of addresses.

Biometric voter identification was introduced to the Electoral Code in February 2020 based on a political agreement aiming to safeguard and modernize the voter identification process. It was implemented for the first time in these elections, in all regular polling stations. Additional amendments in April 2021 clarified the identification procedures, which, together with the appointment of a new SEC and a late procurement and software development process, resulted in a compressed timeframe for implementation and impeded the SEC's ability to adopt in a timely manner relevant by-laws, procedures, trainings, and voter education.³⁹ Despite the absence of a pilot project, which could have allowed the SEC to assess the quality of the national fingerprint database and to address potential problems related to the hardware or software, no comprehensive testing or quality assessment of the integrated voter identification system were conducted prior to deploying the devices to all polling stations.⁴⁰ In addition, the lack of technical specifications for the infrastructure, most notably the servers, in both the tender and the contract, reduced the transparency of the development and implementation of the system, including with regards to the protection of voters' personal data.

³⁶ Data provided include a voter's name, surname, date of birth, address and polling station. Article 9.1 of the [2020 Law on Personal Data Protection](#) states that personal data are to be "processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorized or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organizational measures ("integrity and confidentiality")." See also paragraph 10 of the [1988 General Comment No. 16 of the CCPR](#), which states that "[e]ffective measures have to be taken by States to ensure that information concerning a person's private life does not reach the hands of persons who are not authorized by law to receive, process and use it [...]"

³⁷ The total included 2,250 voters in penitentiary and care institutions registered to vote early on 16 October.

³⁸ The format of most databases is not compatible, and some key transfer of data, most notably from the Office of Birth, Marriage and Death to the MoIA, is still done through daily paper-based transmission.

³⁹ A total of 4,000 mobile BVIDs were procured in August 2021 from the German company DERMALOG and delivered between 3 September and 9 October.

⁴⁰ Contrary to Article 3 of the SEC-DERMALOG contract, which states that testing must be conducted by 11 October, only six days prior to the first round.

The BVIDs were operated by the EB president or deputy president to verify voters' identity by matching scanned fingerprints against those contained in the electronic voter lists uploaded onto the devices.⁴¹ Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including political parties, welcomed the introduction of biometric voter identification as an effective means to prevent fraud, including multiple voting and voter impersonation. Some MECs regretted that no measures were implemented to verify that voters whose fingerprints could not be matched in the system had not voted more than once.⁴²

In case of technical issues with BVIDs on the election days, the MECs co-ordinated IT support to EBs, including the potential replacement of devices.⁴³ As a contingency, voter identity could be established using printed voter lists and the scanning of voters' IDs. Data contained in the BVIDs, including voters' fingerprint data, was deleted by the SEC within 10 days of the announcement of the final results, in accordance with the law. The SEC did not publish information on the quality of the fingerprint database by municipality, or on the number of voters who were successfully identified with the BVIDs, but expressed to the ODIHR EOM its intention to identify measures to improve the biometric voter identification process in future elections.

To ensure integrity and public confidence in the election process, the use of new technologies, including biometric identification devices, should be introduced after sufficient time and with detailed provisions to ensure adequate testing and for all stakeholders to be acquainted with the operation of such equipment.

VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Citizens who are at least 18 years of age on election day and have the right to vote are eligible to stand for the office of mayor or councilor in the municipality of their registered residence. The legal framework prohibits those currently serving or awaiting to serve a delivered sentence of more than six months of imprisonment from standing in elections. At odds with international obligations, persons whose legal capacity has been revoked on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability are denied the right to stand as candidates.

Candidates for mayor and for councilor could be nominated by registered political parties or coalitions, or they could run independently, supported by groups of voters. While mayoral candidates may stand individually, the Electoral Code requires that the number of candidates on submitted councilor lists equals the total number of seats in the respective municipal council, which precludes councilor candidates from running individually, challenging OSCE commitments.⁴⁴

The legal framework should be amended to provide for possibilities for independent candidates to contest councilor elections individually.

⁴¹ If a voter's fingerprint could not be verified against the fingerprint in the electronic voter list, the voter identity could be checked by scanning the voter's ID or entering the unique identification number. The BVIDs were not networked or connected to the Internet.

⁴² Invisible ink and UV lamp verification were not consistently applied for voters whose fingerprint could not be successfully identified with the devices, and a nationwide comparison of the fingerprints collected by the BVIDs, which is permitted by law, was not requested by SEC members after the elections.

⁴³ A call center to co-ordinate IT support was operated by Alphazet, and IT support was provided in co-operation with Simboliko; both companies are DERMALOG subcontractors.

⁴⁴ 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".

To support independent mayoral candidates and lists of independent councilors, groups of voters must collect between 100 and 1,000 supporting signatures of eligible voters residing in the respective municipality, depending on the municipality's total population.⁴⁵ The lowest number of required signatures was established for municipalities with up to 10,000 inhabitants; however, in most of the municipalities falling under this category, the actual number of registered voters ranges between 2,000 and 7,000. In practice, therefore, the required number of supporting signatures varied between 0.4 and 5 per cent of voters registered in the respective municipality, contrary to international good practice and the principle of equal opportunity to stand for election.⁴⁶ Supporting signatures could be collected at designated notaries' offices and at SEC regional offices in the presence of SEC officials.

To ensure equal opportunities in the right to stand for all candidates, the required number of supporting signatures for independent candidates should be proportional to the actual number of registered voters per constituency. Consideration should be given to standardizing the required number of signatures at up to one per cent of registered voters, in line with international good practice.

The candidate registration process was generally inclusive. ODIHR EOM observers noted some confusion over and inconsistent adherence to registration procedures in a few MECs, regarding corrections of deficiencies in submitted nomination documents and data entry into the SEC's online application for processing and publishing candidate lists. This resulted at times in conflicting or incomplete information on candidate registration being available to the public.⁴⁷

By the deadline of 18 September, MECs and the ECCS registered a total of 10,649 candidates on 571 candidate lists for municipal councils, submitted by 28 political parties, 6 coalitions and 58 groups of voters. Women comprised some 45 per cent of all councilor candidates and headed 111 candidate lists (19 per cent). All registered candidate lists complied with the gender requirements.⁴⁸ Mayoral races were contested by a total of 299 candidates nominated by 22 political parties, 5 coalitions, and 25 groups of voters; only 25 (8 per cent) mayoral candidates were women. The ODIHR EOM is aware of the rejection of 3 mayoral candidates and 9 candidate lists for municipal councilors by MECs, on grounds of late submission or deficiencies in nomination documents; all 12 rejections were appealed to and dismissed by the Administrative Court.

VIII. CAMPAIGN

The official first-round campaign began on 27 September and ended on 15 October at midnight. The second-round campaign began on 18 October and ended at midnight on 29 October. Several

⁴⁵ For these elections, supporting signatures were collected between 16 and 30 August. Of 69 groups of voters which had announced their intention to nominate candidate lists for municipal councils, 67 obtained the required number of signatures. For the nomination of mayoral candidates, 30 of 38 prospective independent candidates collected the number of signatures required for registration.

⁴⁶ Section I.1.3.ii of the Venice Commission's [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states that "law should not require collection of the signatures of more than 1% of voters in the constituency concerned". In a total of 42 municipalities, the required number of signatures exceeded 1 per cent. In 6 of these municipalities, it exceeded 2 per cent, and in 9 it was above 3 per cent. In the municipalities of Vevchani and Lozovo, it reached 4.8 and 5 per cent, respectively. See also section I.2.3.ii of the [Code of Good Practice](#).

⁴⁷ In addition, some MECs informed the ODIHR EOM that they were not always able to comply with all deadlines, due to the late submission of data regarding candidates' criminal records by courts.

⁴⁸ Each gender must account for at least 40 per cent of candidates on lists for municipal councils, with a requirement that a candidate of the less represented gender is included in each group of three consecutive places, with an additional place within every group of ten candidates reserved for a candidate of the less represented gender.

contestants started to engage voters in activities prior to the official start of the campaign. The campaign was active and generally peaceful throughout the country, despite isolated incidents.⁴⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the campaign, with contestants required to follow government safety protocols for public meetings.⁵⁰ Still, fundamental rights and freedoms, such as those of assembly and of movement, were respected throughout the campaign, and contestants could campaign freely, conveying their messages to the voters.⁵¹ However, multiple instances of negative rhetoric were noted, frequently directed at women candidates, and the major parties engaged in mutual attacks.⁵² On 27 October, the prime minister and leader of SDSM made unsubstantiated claims in a media interview that Danela Arsovska, the independent mayoral candidate for the city of Skopje supported by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), held Bulgarian citizenship and called on her to withdraw. The use of such rhetoric detracted from more issue-based debates, despite pledges by contestants to adhere to a Code for Fair and Democratic Elections signed under the auspices of the SEC on 23 September.⁵³

Traditional campaign methods included rallies and billboards, with an increased focus on smaller-scale meetings and door-to-door activities in the second round. Provisions in the Electoral Code regulating the distribution of public spaces for posters and billboards disproportionately advantage certain parliamentary parties at the expense of smaller parties and independent candidates.⁵⁴ However, the allocation of these spaces was not contentious in these elections.

In line with the principle of equality of opportunity, campaign rules should be revised to provide for more equitable access to the media and allocation of spaces for posters and billboards for small parties and independent candidates.

Contestants also relied on subsidized advertising in broadcast and online news media and conducted extensive outreach on social networking platforms (see *Media* section). The ODIHR EOM observed that many incumbents used their institutional social network accounts for campaigning, taking advantage of their public position. In the absence of clear regulations on campaigning in social networks and effective moderation by parties and candidates of comments on their social network pages, many candidates, frequently women, were subjected to offensive language. Political advertising in non-media online tools, such as Google Ads and on social networks, are not subsidized or specifically regulated by national legislation. Whereas political parties used social networks

⁴⁹ For example, the Makedonska Era Treta mayoral candidate from Mogila received threats by SMS from a local VMRO-DPMNE leader, who later apologized, and police investigated a gunfire incident targeting the house of the SDSM mayoral candidate from the same municipality.

⁵⁰ ODIHR EOM observers reported that the interpretation of and compliance with COVID-related guidelines varied among political parties; for example, vaccination certificates were not always checked at indoor rallies, and personal protective equipment such as face masks was not always worn by attendants.

⁵¹ The ODIHR EOM observed a total of 61 rallies in 33 municipalities.

⁵² In a [public statement](#) after the closing of the polls on 17 October, Mr. Zaev implied that VMRO-DPMNE represents “evil”; VMRO-DPMNE President Hristijan Mickoski, during a campaign meeting in Skopje on 20 October [stated](#) that “the government has not understood anything but continues with blackmails, threats, abuse of the police in the elections [and] vote buying”.

⁵³ The Code stipulates that campaigns should be conducted in a transparent and fair manner with respect for all contestants’ freedom to campaign, without coercion, bribery or intimidation.

⁵⁴ According to the Code, the two largest ruling and two largest opposition parliamentary parties “who won the most votes in the last parliamentary elections” are entitled to 40 per cent, respectively, of available billboard space, while the remaining parliamentary parties are entitled to share 10 per cent and independent candidates may share 10 per cent. Section I.2.3 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that the equality of opportunity of electoral contestants must be guaranteed and “must apply to the use of public facilities for electioneering purposes (for example bill posting)”.

extensively in their campaigns, the lack of transparency of such tools renders any substantial audit impossible.

Women were under-represented in parties' campaigns and topics relating to gender equality and women's rights were largely absent from contestants' platforms and speeches, notwithstanding limited attempts by a few parties to present such policies to voters.⁵⁵ According to ODIHR EOM interlocutors, women face multiple challenges when attempting to access political decision-making positions. Most political parties met by the ODIHR EOM do not have effective internal promotion mechanisms and do not engage their women members in developing them.

Political parties should take further steps to encourage the participation of women in the electoral process and in internal political decision-making.

National party leaders and central government officials featured prominently at campaign events, introducing local candidates and delivering messages related to employment, health, local infrastructure, environment, and education. Although these activities are legal and generally took place largely outside of working hours, the Electoral Code does not clearly regulate the conduct of public officials in the campaign.⁵⁶

The legal framework for campaigning should be further amended to include clear rules for the participation of public officials, including on social networks.

Positively, the Electoral Code contains provisions prohibiting the use of administrative resources in the campaign, including a moratorium on announcing new publicly funded projects from the day elections are called, as well as a ban on the use of state offices, equipment or personnel for campaign purposes, and on pressure on public employees. From the announcement of elections, extraordinary/unplanned payments of salaries, pensions or welfare may not be made from budgetary funds. The September 2021 amendments included provisions to enhance the transparency of the use of state-owned vehicles during the electoral campaign. However, in the absence of systematic monitoring by relevant institutions, the effectiveness of these measures remained in question.

Allegations of pressure on voters, including on police and other public employees, to vote for certain contestants were made by some ODIHR EOM interlocutors. In addition, the ODIHR EOM received claims of public-service workers being pressured to provide lists of voters who would vote for a specific candidate. The ODIHR EOM also received persistent claims of intimidation and pressure on some candidates, including by police officials.⁵⁷ The Macedonian Police Union issued a statement on 27 October calling on political parties to refrain from pressuring police officers and on members of police units not to serve the interests of political parties. Actions that prevent voters to freely cast their

⁵⁵ Some 14 per cent of the speakers at rallies observed by the ODIHR EOM were women, and women constituted some 30 per cent, on average, of the audience at observed rallies.

⁵⁶ According to the [Code of Ethics for members of the government and executive management of institutions](#), managers of public institutions may participate in political party activities outside working hours but must not jeopardize their professionalism. On 30 October, the electoral silence day before the second-round election day, DUI spokesperson and Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi posted on his Facebook page a [video](#) of himself welcoming voters arriving from abroad and waiting to be bused to Kichevo. On the same day, DUI mayoral candidate Fatmir Dehari posted [videos](#) of himself welcoming the same voters in Kichevo, in buses displaying his campaign posters.

⁵⁷ The independent candidate for mayor of Kumanovo, incumbent Maksim Dimitrievski, publicly alleged pressure and intimidation against his campaign by Interior Minister Oliver Spasovski and by the Kumanovo chief of police. The independent candidate and incumbent mayor of Debarca, Zoran Nogacheski, in a social media post, alleged pressure on voters by his opponent from SDSM.

votes without fear of retribution are contrary to North Macedonia's international commitments.⁵⁸ Persistent allegations of the major parties buying votes were also made to the ODIHR EOM. However, limited action was taken by political leaders to react to such allegations.⁵⁹

Continued vigorous efforts should be made by the authorities to counter any form of pressure on voters and on public and private-sector employees, including buying of votes. In line with existing legislation, reports of pressure and vote buying should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted, with protection for those who reported.

Public institutions should be proactive in informing public and state employees of independent mechanisms where they can report pressure in relation to elections, and senior state officials should issue clear public statements and written instructions that such actions will not be tolerated and that no citizen should fear any negative consequences as a result of supporting or not supporting any candidate or party.

Some contestants actively sought to draw support from smaller ethnic communities or from outside their traditional support base in the second round. For example, at a rally in Skopje on 23 October, an SDSM candidate addressed voters with messages in the Macedonian, Albanian and Romani languages, while the mayoral candidate for Tetovo and leader of the ethnic-Albanian Movement BESA published online campaign materials in Macedonian. Political parties representing smaller ethnic communities, including Roma, Serbs and Turks, generally aligned with national political forces in pre-election coalitions. However, some local political actors informed the ODIHR EOM that this does not always translate into effective representation of their communities' needs, and that the parliamentary parties do not meaningfully reach out to these sectors of the electorate. The Bosniak Democratic Union ran independently for the first time, including for the position of Skopje city mayor.

IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is primarily regulated by the Electoral Code, the Law on Financing of Political Parties, and the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests. On 21 September, the Ministry of Finance published the rules, procedures and templates for contestants' reporting on donations and expenditures. Despite an overall comprehensive legal framework for campaign finance, some gaps and inconsistencies remain, and recommendations of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) and the State Audit Office (SAO), as well as the SEC have not been introduced. Insufficient oversight and late publication of information on campaign income reduced transparency and undermined the detection of potential violations.

Election campaigns may be funded from political parties' own funds and bank loans, as well as from donations. The amount of bank loans remains unregulated, contrary to a prior ODIHR recommendation. Political parties which obtained more than one per cent of the vote in the most recent parliamentary or local elections receive public funding for their regular

⁵⁸ Paragraph 7.7 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) calls on OSCE participating States to "ensure that [...] neither administrative action, violence nor intimidation prevents the voters [...] from casting their vote free of fear of retribution".

⁵⁹ Two days prior to the first-round election day, the interior minister called on electoral stakeholders to allow voters to make their own choices and encouraged citizens to report electoral irregularities.

activities.⁶⁰ Donations, whether monetary or in-kind, are limited to EUR 3,000 for individuals and EUR 30,000 for legal entities (equivalent to MKD 183,000 and MKD 1,830,000, respectively).⁶¹ In-kind donations are to be valued at market price. The law does not regulate whether independent candidates can fund their own campaigns only within the donation limits for individuals. No provisions prevent donations after election day, and some interlocutors raised concerns about associated corruption risks.⁶² The campaign spending limit is MKD 110 (approximately EUR 1.8) per voter registered in a municipality.⁶³ The law fails to align donation limits with spending limits, resulting in a possibility that in smaller municipalities a single individual can entirely fund a contestant's campaign.⁶⁴ Third-party campaign financing is not regulated by law.⁶⁵

The legal framework for campaign finance should be revised to address existing gaps, including those concerning the amount of bank loans and the possibility to donate after elections, as well as third-party financing. To prevent undue influence by private donors and potential political corruption, donation and expenditure limits for local elections could be aligned so that a contestant's campaign fund is not sourced from a single donation.

The law requires contestants to file two interim campaign finance reports before the first round, and one before the second round.⁶⁶ Contestants' interim reports must include information on donations, but not on other sources of income or on expenditures, contrary to international good practice.⁶⁷ As a result, many interim reports, including those of the major parliamentary parties with visible campaign spending, contained scarce or no information on the sources of campaign funds. While the law requires the SEC, SCPC and SAO to publish the reports on their websites, it fails to provide a deadline, and the first interim reports for the first round were only published on 14 October, limiting the time for public scrutiny before election day. The second interim report for the first round and the interim report for the second round were not published before the respective election days, undermining transparency.⁶⁸ The SCPC confirmed that some contestants, mostly independent candidates, failed to submit interim reports. Despite this, no sanctions were applied.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ Under the Law on Financing of Political Parties, 0.15 per cent of the total source of income of the state budget must be directed to political parties. Of this, 70 per cent must be allocated to parliamentary parties, proportional to the number of seats obtained, and 30 per cent must be allocated equally to all parties that received at least one per cent of votes in the last parliamentary and local elections. In 2021, some 58 political parties received state funding; of these, SDSM received MKD 49,956,552 and VMRO-DPMNE MKD 44,039,448 (approximately EUR 818,000 and 722,000, respectively).

⁶¹ EUR 1 equals approximately 61 Macedonian Denar (MKD). The law sets donation limits in Euro and expenditure limits in MKD.

⁶² The SAO and SCPC informed the ODIHR EOM that they had noted such donations in previous elections.

⁶³ Depending on the municipal population, spending limits ranged from EUR 3,571 (approx. MKD 217,831) to EUR 169,174 (MKD 10,319,614) in municipalities, and EUR 841,271 (MKD 51,317,531) in the city of Skopje. The same spending limits apply to both first and second rounds.

⁶⁴ Paragraph 213 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) (2nd Edition) provides that “[r]easonable limitations on private donations may include the determination of a maximum amount that may be contributed by a single donor. Such limitations have been shown to be effective in reducing the possibility of corruption or the purchase of political influence”.

⁶⁵ Paragraph 256 of the [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”.

⁶⁶ The interim campaign finance reports were due on 7 and 16 October, and 30 October, respectively. All campaign finance reports must be submitted to the SAO, SCPC, and SEC at the same time.

⁶⁷ Paragraph 261 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that it is good practice to require reports providing oversight bodies and the public with preliminary information on campaign incomes and expenses of parties and candidates several days before election day.

⁶⁸ Article 7.3 of the [UNCAC](#) recommends states take measures “to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office”. Paragraph 247 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “[v]oters must have relevant information as to the financial support given to political parties, as this influences decision making and is a means of holding parties accountable”.

⁶⁹ The Electoral Code provides a sanction of EUR 9,000 for failure to submit campaign finance reports.

A post-election financial report is due within 19 days from election day, and the final report is due 75 days from the announcement of final results. The deadline for submission of final reports remains contrary to international good practice.⁷⁰ The template for financial reports does not require disaggregation of contestants' expenditures by municipality, preventing meaningful scrutiny of their compliance with spending requirements. Most stakeholders questioned the necessity of multiple reports and raised concerns about the complexity of the reporting documentation, especially for smaller parties and independent candidates.⁷¹ Despite a previous ODIHR recommendation, no mechanism for electronic submission of campaign finance reports was established, exacerbating the complexity of financial reporting for the contestants and impeding timely publication of the reports.

To enhance transparency, the Electoral Code should require comprehensive disclosure of all types of campaign income and expenditures by contestants, several days before election day. Campaign finance reports should include a breakdown of expenditures by constituency, and the deadline for submitting final reports should be shortened to reflect international good practice. In line with a prior recommendation, a mechanism for electronic submission of financial reports, including the disclosure of income data, could be established.

By law, the SCPC oversees compliance with campaign finance regulations throughout the electoral process. The SCPC fielded 16 *ad hoc* monitors to follow the campaign, in addition to four experts responsible for analyzing the monitors' reports and for reviewing contestants' bank accounts.⁷² The SCPC informed the ODIHR EOM that it had not detected any major violations of campaign financing regulations in the first or the second round, and that no sanctions had been applied.⁷³ Overall, the ODIHR EOM observed that the SCPC lacked a methodology to track potential campaign finance irregularities prior to the submission of final financial reports, raising doubts about the effectiveness of oversight. The SAO is authorized to audit contestants' final campaign finance reports but does not conduct ongoing oversight during the campaign.

The agencies responsible for campaign finance oversight should conduct an effective scrutiny of campaign income and spending throughout the electoral process and should give proper and timely consideration to all reports and complaints concerning alleged irregularities.

X. MEDIA

A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

A large number of media outlets, divided along political lines, operate in a small advertisement market. Television and online media are the main sources of political information. ODIHR EOM interlocutors highlighted an improved plurality of news coverage but stressed the need for further systemic reforms in the media sector. Ongoing stagnation in the advertising market caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the dependence of media, particularly local media outlets,

⁷⁰ Paragraph 200 of the [Join 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”.

⁷¹ Paragraph 260 of the Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation recommends that “[r]eports should clearly distinguish between income and expenditures. Further, reporting formats should include the itemization of donations into standardized categories as defined by relevant regulations and should be easily accessible and user-friendly and not overly burdensome, while also allowing the relevant data to be processed electronically afterwards”.

⁷² The ODIHR EOM observed that the SCPC monitors lacked comprehensive training to track campaign financing.

⁷³ The Electoral Code provides for fines of up to EUR 9,000 for violations of campaign-finance regulations. Criminal sanctions for most grave and deliberate violations of campaign finance regulations include fines and imprisonment of up to five years.

on state subsidies. The public broadcaster, Macedonian Radio and Television (*MRT*), is financed from the state budget but has never been allocated the full amount prescribed by law.⁷⁴ The field of online media, with a high number of outlets, is largely unregulated. ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns about self-censorship and poor labour conditions in the traditional media, a low level of professionalism, and cyber-harassment, especially against women journalists. During the observation period, a few journalists were targeted by politicians and public officials.⁷⁵

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Electoral Code provides detailed regulations on the conduct of the media, from the announcement of elections through the campaign. All media outlets, including online media, are required to cover the elections in a fair, balanced and unbiased manner. Despite prior ODIHR recommendations, newscasts of public *MRT* remain subject to stringent regulations during the campaign period, which undermines the broadcaster's editorial independence.⁷⁶

Provisions regulating the public broadcaster's newscasts during the campaign period should be revised, with a view to allow for editorial freedom and ensure equitable access and news coverage of smaller parties and independent candidates. Further reforms should aim at strengthening the quality of content produced by the public broadcaster, including investigative and analytical journalism.

Media compliance with legal requirements relating to electoral coverage from the day of the announcement of the elections until the end of voting was overseen by the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AVMS), which published several reports on media coverage during the election period. The AVMS concluded that due to the large number of candidates, as well as the different intensity of their pre-election activities, broadcasters could not comply with the principle of equality. Daily reports by the AVMS to the SEC during the official campaign period were not publicly reviewed by the SEC and did not contribute to efficiency or transparency of media oversight.

The legal requirement on daily reporting by the media regulator to the election administration could be replaced by ad hoc reports addressing specific election-related concerns.

⁷⁴ Article 105 of the Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Services stipulates that the funds for financing the broadcasting activity, operations, and development of *MRT* and the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AVMS) shall be provided from the state budget, in the amount of 0.8 to 1 per cent of the overall state budget. According to *MRT*, the actual allocation of the budget decreased from 0.66 to 0.59 per cent from 2018 to 2021. [Recommendation No. R \(96\) 10](#) of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Guarantee of the Independence of Public Service Broadcasting stipulates that the "payment of the contribution should be made in a way which guarantees the continuity of the activities of the public service broadcasting organisation and which allows it to engage in long-term planning".

⁷⁵ For example, the AVMS condemned a [verbal attack](#) of an independent mayoral candidate for Kichevo municipality against a *TV21* female reporter, covering the electoral period, and [an attempt to discredit a journalist](#) by the AA mayoral candidate in Tetovo. The [AVMS](#) and the [Association of Journalists of Macedonia \(AJM\)](#) publicly condemned the alleged inappropriate conduct towards journalists by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the SEC president. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the ODIHR EOM that it rejects the claims and addressed a letter to the AJM. The SEC president publicly apologized. The 21 October 2021 [Joint Declaration](#) of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information denounces public statements from politicians and public officials that are "threatening or encouraging attacks on journalists, human rights defenders, and putting minorities at risk".

⁷⁶ During the official campaign period, *MRT* 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.

Although no violations were reported, the AVMS issued statements concerning a number of cases of the use of minors in political advertising, as well as on the legal obligation of broadcasters to make their electoral coverage accessible, including through the use of sign language, which was fulfilled only by one private cable TV channel.

National broadcasters should endeavour to make their programmes accessible for persons with sensory impairments. Consideration could be given to amend the Electoral Code in order to provide clearer and more specific guidance on transmitting accessible information to the electorate.

Paid advertising in media during the campaign period is funded directly and exclusively from the state budget.⁷⁷ The law fails to provide objective and reasonable criteria for the distribution of public funds for paid advertisement, giving a substantial advantage to the largest parliamentary parties, while effectively denying opportunities for smaller parties and independent candidates to campaign in the media. In its current form, the law significantly distorts the playing field, especially in the context of mayoral run-offs, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice.⁷⁸ Levica and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) challenged the AVMS's list of smaller parties that share a minute of paid airtime per hour, arguing that some smaller parties ran in coalitions or were part of parliamentary groups of larger parties and therefore should have been allocated more airtime. As a result, the AVMS removed the list without further clarification on the division of airtime. No official information on the actual budget allocated for the campaign in the media was published, which led contestants to plan their activities based on the maximum amount prescribed by the law, while the broadcasters risked not to be reimbursed for the services provided. The AVMS issued guidance indicating that contestants could further divide or share their state-subsidized airtime with independent candidates, beyond the allocations envisaged by law.⁷⁹

Regulations on paid political advertisement in the media should be revised, in order to allow unimpeded access to the media based on reasonable and objective criteria and to avoid a disproportionate advantage to the larger parliamentary parties. There should be a clear decision, before the start of the official campaign period, on the division of the budget and airtime among smaller parties and independent candidates.

⁷⁷ The budget for campaigning in the media must not exceed EUR 2 per voter in the first round, and EUR 1 per voter in municipalities where a second round is held. The average price for paid advertising in TV, as calculated by the SEC in line with the law, could not exceed EUR 1.97 per second. To provide paid airtime to contestants, media had to register with the SEC. While the SEC registered some 300 media outlets, the applications of at least 27 media outlets were denied, mostly on grounds of missed deadlines and for not submitting all required documents.

⁷⁸ The SDSM-led coalition "The Best for My Municipality", DUI, the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition "Renewal of Macedonia" and AA and AlternAtivA received 90 per cent of allocated funds, while smaller parliamentary parties shared 7 per cent and all non-parliamentary parties and independent candidates were supposed to share the remaining 3 per cent of funds. Paragraph 7.8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to guarantee that "no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process". Section I.2.3 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that equality of opportunity must be guaranteed for parties and candidates alike, *inter alia* with respect to media airtime and public funds, and that depending on the subject matter, equality may be strict or proportional. Paragraph 233 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) provides that public funds should be "allocated in a non-partisan way, based on fair and reasonable criteria" and paragraph 235 provides that "a system for determining the proportional (or equitable) distribution of financial or in-kind state support must be objective, fair and reasonable".

⁷⁹ For example, VMRO-DPMNE supported independent mayoral candidate Danela Arsovska in Skopje; as such a possibility is not regulated by the law, it was challenged by Levica to the SCPC. The SCPC established that there was a gap in the Electoral Code and rejected the complaint.



C. ODIHR EOM MEDIA MONITORING

[Click Here to Read Media Monitoring Results](#)

According to ODIHR EOM media monitoring, the election-related coverage in broadcast media was overall neutral in tone in both rounds.⁸⁰ During the official campaign period, the two largest parliamentary parties dominated in the news of the monitored national broadcasters.⁸¹ The media monitored by the ODIHR EOM reflected the division of political parties and media along ethnic lines, both with regards to the media outlets chosen by political parties to place advertisements and to broadcasters' choice of invitees to debates and current-affairs programmes.⁸² In both rounds, DUI dominated in the coverage of the monitored Albanian-language online media, with *Lajmpress.org* also giving the party some positive coverage. Macedonian-language *Kurir.mk* extensively covered VMRO-DPME, mostly in a neutral tone.

Only a few candidates expressed interest in using free airtime on the two monitored public TV channels. The choice of candidates for numerous televised debates and talk-shows in private media remained under editorial discretion. Most non-parliamentary parties and independent candidates received limited editorial coverage in the first round, partly due to their low-key campaign activities, and also placed few paid political advertisements due to their limited budget.⁸³ Danela Arsovska (Skopje) and Maksim Dimitrievski (Kumanovo) received almost all national coverage dedicated to independent candidates in the news programmes of monitored channels in the second round. With fewer candidates, the monitored broadcasters provided voters with ample information about the contestants in the second round.

XI. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legislation for the resolution of electoral disputes contains numerous gaps and ambiguities which hamper the process, including with regard to short deadlines, the requirement for a public hearing, and review of complaints in lower-level election commissions.⁸⁴ The ambiguous formulation of new deadlines introduced by the September 2021 amendments to the Electoral Code created additional uncertainty.⁸⁵ Despite frequent revisions of the law, previous ODIHR recommendations concerning

⁸⁰ On 22 September, the ODIHR EOM commenced its quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the primetime broadcasts (between 18:00 and 00:00 hrs.) of public *MRT 1* and *MRT 2*, private broadcasters *Alsat-M*, *Kanal 5*, *Telma*, and *Sitel*, and the election-related coverage of the websites [kurir.mk](#), [plusinfo.mk](#), [tetovasot.com](#), and [lajmpress.org](#).

⁸¹ In private channels' newscasts, in the first round, SDSM received between 18 and 31 per cent of coverage, and VMRO-DPMNE between 13 and 28 per cent, while in the second round, they received between 17 and 31 per cent and between 13 and 21 per cent, respectively.

⁸² In Macedonian-language channels, the Albanian parties received up to 3 per cent of coverage in current affairs programmes and debates in the first round, and up to 2 per cent in the second round, while the Albanian-language channels covered these parties almost exclusively. While paid advertisement by ethnic-Albanian parties was almost absent from Macedonian-language channels, some 86 and 81 per cent of paid advertising in *Alsat-M* during the monitoring period was placed by Albanian parties.

⁸³ Except for Danela Arsovska, who received in the two rounds 7 and some 3 per cent, respectively, of VMRO-DPMNE's paid advertising share during the monitored period and was visible throughout the campaign period.

⁸⁴ As a rule, applicants have up to 2 days to file a complaint, with 1–3 days provided for review of most complaints. Following the latest changes, election-day complaints by voters must be lodged within 12 hours (previously 24 hours) and must be reviewed within 2 hours. Section h II.3.3(95) of [the Explanatory Report of the Code of Good Practice](#) states that "time limits must [...] be long enough to make an appeal possible, to guarantee the exercise of rights of defense and a reflected decision. A time limit of three to five days at first instance (both for lodging appeals and making rulings) seems reasonable".

⁸⁵ This prompted the Administrative Court to request official clarification from the Ministry of Justice. The court notified the ODIHR EOM that as of 15 October, they had not received a response, and decided to apply the longest deadline provided by law (3 days) to all appeals concerning election-day irregularities.

the adjudication of election disputes remain unaddressed. The legal standing of voters to file complaints remains limited to cases regarding voter lists and their individual voting rights, contrary to international good practice.⁸⁶ Citizen observers are not eligible to file complaints.⁸⁷

The legal standing to file complaints should be extended to voters and citizen observers. To allow adequate time for the filing and handling of complaints, deadlines could be brought in line with international good practice.

Under the Electoral Code, complaints at first instance can be filed with MECs, the SEC, and the basic courts. Basic courts and the SEC review complaints against campaign violations, but their jurisdiction on these matters is not clearly delineated. Complaints concerning campaign finance and the misuse of administrative resources can be lodged with the SCPC. The Administrative Court is the final instance of appeals for the majority of complaints. Unlike SEC decisions on violations of individual rights, SEC regulations can only be challenged before the Constitutional Court, without an expedited procedure provided, which limits the possibility of effective redress.⁸⁸

To ensure effective remedy, the law should provide for the possibility of timely judicial review of all election-related administrative decisions, including all State Election Commission regulations.

B. PRE-ELECTION COMPLAINTS

As of 15 October, the SEC received and reviewed in public sessions 23 complaints, most concerning the right to vote, including homebound voting; of these, 17 were upheld. In most cases, the SEC did not abide by the deadlines for reviewing complaints, and many decisions were not published, undermining transparency. The SEC instructions for handling complaints were adopted late in the process and contained discrepancies regarding deadlines, affecting the proper understanding of required procedures, especially at the MEC level.⁸⁹ In line with the law, the SEC maintained an electronic system for filing and tracking complaints, but did not launch it until 6 October and did not consistently update it, which resulted in limited public information about complaints and related decisions. Neither the law nor SEC instructions require election commissions to notify the parties to a case about the hearing; the SEC confirmed that only registered contestants were invited to attend the hearings, contrary to international good practice.⁹⁰

The SCPC reviewed two complaints in public session and in observance of the procedural rights of the parties to the case. However, 30 reports filed to the SCPC from the announcement of elections, most alleging misuse of state resources, were not treated as complaints and hence were not reviewed in an expedited manner, undermining effective remedy.

The Administrative Court received and adjudicated 14 complaints prior to first-round election day, 12 concerning candidate registration and 2 concerning the eligibility of certain media outlets to receive state funding for paid political advertisement; all were rejected or dismissed. As required by law, the Administrative Court published its decisions on complaints in a timely manner. Despite the

⁸⁶ Section II.3.3.f of the [Code of Good Practice](#) 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”.

⁸⁷ Observers can only have their remarks on alleged irregularities entered in EB logbooks.

⁸⁸ Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that “everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity”.

⁸⁹ An instruction concerning review of complaints by MECs was adopted on 30 September and published on 3 October, and an instruction for review by the SEC was adopted on 8 October and published on 11 October.

⁹⁰ Section II.3.3.h of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that “the applicant’s right to a hearing involving both parties must be protected”.

constitutional requirement for a public hearing, the Administrative Court handled most complaints without a hearing, contrary to international obligations.⁹¹

To increase transparency and ensure due process, the right to a public hearing involving both parties should be protected at both courts and election commissions.

C. ELECTION-DAY AND POST-ELECTION COMPLAINTS

On the first-round election day, 699 complaints were filed by voters regarding their right to vote; of these, 495 were upheld.⁹² On the second-round election day, including the second round mayoral election in Debar on 14 November, the SEC reported 794 complaints regarding voters' right to vote; 699 of these were upheld. Complaints regarding the right to vote could be filed in person to MECs or electronically. While in some cases MECs acted promptly on these complaints, many were handled past the deadline, largely due to delays in communication with the SEC.⁹³ In addition, a lack of understanding among MECs of procedures for handling complaints led to their inconsistent application; while MECs were generally involved in processing complaints, many refrained from reviewing them and forwarded the complaints to the SEC for a decision. As a result, a number of first-round complaints concerning the right to vote were not addressed, depriving those voters of the opportunity to vote and undermining effective remedy. The ODIHR EOM observed that where MECs undertook to consider complaints, these were often not reviewed in public sessions nor in a collegial manner.

Consideration could be given to strengthening the Municipal Election Commissions' capacity and relevant procedures for handling complaints. The electronic system for filing and tracking complaints could be upgraded to provide timely updates of submitted complaints and increase transparency.

Following the first round, the SEC reviewed 14 complaints, 2 concerning violation of the campaign silence and 12 concerning the results, all filed by contestants.⁹⁴ All of these were rejected or dismissed, often without due consideration given to the substance of the complaint and the evidence provided concerning the alleged violation.⁹⁵ Three complaints were dismissed for being lodged by an unauthorized representative of the contestants, without giving the contestants the possibility to re-submit the complaints through their legally authorized representative;⁹⁶ four complaints were dismissed for having been submitted shortly after the deadline.⁹⁷ Following the second round, the

⁹¹ Article 16 of the [ICCPR](#) provide for a fundamental right to a fair and public hearing by a competent court.

⁹² As of 30 October, the SEC was unable to confirm the total number of complaints for the first round, due to a number of apparent duplicate complaints filed both in person and electronically. In advance of the second round, the SEC reviewed 122 additional complaints from voters regarding their right to vote and homebound voting; of these, 82 were upheld.

⁹³ MECs did not have access to the voter register and were required to verify voters' data with the SEC. The high number of such requests on the first-round election day led to a significant backlog, further exacerbated by technical problems. Some MECs informed the ODIHR EOM that they received the necessary information only shortly before the end of voting.

⁹⁴ Fifteen complaints concerning the first-round results were withdrawn, including complaints submitted by AA, DUI, SDSM, and VMRO-DPMNE. Some contestants informed the ODIHR EOM that their complaints were withdrawn in anticipation of being rejected for lack of evidence owing to stringent legal criteria for admissibility of evidence, as well as a lack of confidence in the system for election-dispute resolution.

⁹⁵ In several cases, the SEC refused to consider provided evidence due to the absence of a related remark in results protocols or rejected the complaints for lack of evidence without attempting to properly examine evidence provided by the applicant, despite a prior ODIHR recommendation.

⁹⁶ Section II.3.3b of the [Code of Good Practice](#) recommends that "the procedure must be simple and devoid from formalism, in particular concerning the admissibility of appeals".

⁹⁷ While two dismissed complaints challenged issues during tabulation and hence under the law could be lodged within 48 hours from the announcement of results, the SEC noted in the respective decisions that these complaints had to be submitted within 48 hours from the closing of voting.

SEC reviewed 15 complaints concerning the result; of these, 14 were rejected or dismissed.⁹⁸ One complaint was upheld, and the SEC annulled the results in one polling station in Zhelino. While all complaints were reviewed in public sessions, the parties to the case were not consistently invited to attend, and some sessions were not streamed online. Overall, multiple shortcomings in the handling of complaints at the SEC undermined the right to effective redress, at odds with OSCE commitments.⁹⁹

To guarantee effective redress, the rules on the admissibility of complaints should establish reasonable requirements, and the scope of admissible evidence should not be unduly limited. Decisions of the election administration should be reasoned, ensuring effective examination of the merits of all complaints.

Two SEC decisions on the first-round results were appealed to the Administrative Court; both were reversed, and the results in two polling stations in Debar and in Shuto Orizari were annulled. Five SEC decisions on the results were appealed to the Administrative Court following the second round. One SEC decision, concerning the annulment of results in one polling station in Zhelino, was reversed, while all other SEC decisions were upheld.

The State Public Prosecutor's Office announced that it had received a number of reports on potential criminal conduct during the electoral period, including concerning alleged vote-buying and pressure on voters, as well as violent incidents during a campaign event and at a candidate's residence.¹⁰⁰ As of the close of the ODIHR EOM, these remained under investigation.

XII. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS

The Electoral Code provides for citizen and international observation and also entitles registered contestants to appoint their authorized representatives to follow the entire election process, contributing to the transparency of the election process. Citizen associations and foreign organizations which have been registered at least one year before election day and whose charter incorporates the principle of protection of human rights may apply with the SEC until 10 days before election day for accreditation of observers.¹⁰¹ Candidate representatives to lower-level election bodies can be registered with MECs until two days before election day. The Electoral Code does not explicitly regulate the accreditation process for runoff elections. The SEC published data on accredited observers only shortly before the second-round election day; however, the numbers listed on the SEC website did not fully correspond to the numbers announced during the respective sessions. No information on registered contestants' authorized representatives was available.

In an inclusive manner, the SEC extended the observer accreditation period for all organizations wishing to observe before each round of elections, without setting deadlines. Despite an invitation by the SEC addressed to all organizations entitled to observe the elections, capacity and interest among CSOs was limited. Accreditations issued in the first round for observers and foreign journalists, as well as for representatives of electoral contestants who contested the second round, remained valid for the run-offs. In total for both rounds, the SEC accredited 7 citizen observer organizations with a

⁹⁸ Eight complaints were withdrawn, 7 - by SDSM and 1 - by VMRO-DPMNE.

⁹⁹ Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that "everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity".

¹⁰⁰ A commission was established within the State Public Prosecutor's Office to co-ordinate the investigation of election-related irregularities.

¹⁰¹ While the Electoral Code and the SEC calendar set 10 days before election day as the latest date for submission of applications for accreditation, the SEC Code of Conduct for the 2021 local elections indicated 5 days before election day.

total of 1,210 observers, as well as 2 international organizations and 19 diplomatic and foreign delegations.¹⁰² Among citizen observer organizations, CIVIL – Center for Freedom was the only group to conduct long-term observation activities across the country, starting in mid-August. On both election days, CIVIL deployed some 280 short-term observers. The organization presented findings from its pre-election media and campaign monitoring at several press conferences and on their website before both election days and reported on its observations throughout both election days, contributing to the transparency of the process.

After the first round, CIVIL informed the ODIHR EOM that some of their observers had been hindered in their work during the first-round election day, pointing to a lack of understanding of procedures by EB members but also mentioning the fact that their SEC-issued observer badges did not contain the required personal identification data. Furthermore, indication of affiliation is not required for observer accreditation or contestant representatives' badges. Despite repeated appeals by the SEC after the first round to all election officials to abide by their legal obligation to facilitate access to all accredited persons to all stages of the election process and to enable the media to carry out their work inside polling stations, obstacles for some observers and journalists in a few polling stations persisted.¹⁰³

Election administration bodies at all levels should ensure unimpeded access of all accredited observers to the entire election process. To enhance transparency, the election administration should keep records of all observers and contestants' representatives accredited to observe, make these available to the public in a timely manner and provide those accredited with proper identification, clearly indicating their names and affiliation.

XIII. ELECTION DAYS

A. FIRST ROUND

The first-round election day on 17 October was generally peaceful, with a voter turnout of 51.44 per cent announced by the SEC.¹⁰⁴ The SEC shared updates about the voting process throughout election day and began posting on its website detailed preliminary election results by polling station on election night, which enhanced transparency. The presidents of 55 per cent of EBs observed by ODIHR EOM observers were women, and overall, 47 per cent of EB members in polling station observed were women.

The opening of polls was assessed positively in 58 of the 64 polling stations where it was observed by ODIHR EOM observers. However, in 8 polling stations where opening was observed, the BVIDs were not operational, and in 31 the EB had difficulties operating the devices. Opening procedures were generally followed, although 10 EBs did not demonstrate to all present that the ballot boxes were empty or seal them properly, and 5 did not enter the serial number of seals in the EB logbook. Twenty-seven of the polling stations observed experienced mostly minor delays in opening for voting.

ODIHR EOM observers assessed voting positively in 97 per cent of the 625 polling stations where it was observed, characterizing the process as transparent, calm and well-organized. COVID-19

¹⁰² The largest citizen observer group was deployed by AKSIOS 2017 Skopje, with 512 accredited observers in the first round, as announced by the SEC during its sessions. However, the data published by the SEC indicated 529 observers. Additional 221 observers were accredited for the second round.

¹⁰³ After the first round, the SEC received such notifications from CIVIL and from the Association of Journalists of Macedonia. The SEC's [appeal](#) was published by a number of media outlets. On the second-round election day, the SEC president repeated the appeal at a press conference, in response to a report that journalists had been obstructed from entering a polling station.

¹⁰⁴ The SEC on election night announced the preliminary turnout of 48.99 per cent, as of 18:30 hrs.

protection measures were generally followed, although social distancing was not always maintained. Many ODIHR EOM observers reported problems with the BVIDs, and in 14 per cent of polling stations observed the voting process was not smooth due to these problems. In 4 per cent of polling stations where voting was observed, the BVIDs were not functional, while in many other polling stations, the devices had various technical problems. A recurring and widespread problem was the failure of BVIDs to match voters' fingerprints to the voter list; in 75 per cent of polling stations observed, not every voter on the voter list could be positively identified by fingerprint scanning. This appeared to particularly affect elderly voters and voters in rural areas. Most EBs in observed polling stations dealt with these problems professionally. The SEC attributed these problems to the poor quality of fingerprint data in the database provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, stating that at least a quarter of these data had been identified by the SEC as inadequate. After neither election day did the SEC publish any official information on data collected by the BVIDs or the number of voters who were added to the voter lists on election day.

To enhance the credibility and ensure the integrity of the biometric voter identification system, the State Election Commission should publish the number of voters whose fingerprints were identified by the equipment, per constituency and polling station, as part of the announcement of preliminary results.

The SEC announced that it had authorized seven EBs to continue voting without using a BVID and warned that where EBs had switched to the previous system without SEC authorization, voting would be cancelled. After election day, the SEC affirmed that no such cases had been confirmed upon verification of the results protocols. The SEC also extended voting by 30 minutes and announced that voters who were inside the polling station compound at closing time would be allowed to vote. In 11 polling stations, voting was extended for more than one hour as a result of prolonged interruptions due to technical problems of the BVIDs.

To enhance the integrity of and trust in the voting process, the authorities should undertake comprehensive efforts to improve the quality of databases used for voter identification on election day and the functionality of the biometric voter identification system.

Problems with the BVIDs notwithstanding, voter identification procedures were generally adhered to in the observed polling stations. In 14 per cent of observed polling stations, one or more voters were denied the opportunity to vote, most because they were unable to produce a valid ID or could not be found on the voter list of that polling station. Voting procedures were generally respected, although ODIHR EOM observers noted that not all voters marked their ballots in secrecy (6 per cent of observed polling stations). ODIHR EOM observers reported widespread instances of group voting (8 per cent of observed polling stations), which negatively impacts women's participation. In 3 per cent of observed polling stations, the ballot boxes were not properly sealed.

Campaign materials and campaign activities were noted in the vicinity of 4 per cent of polling station observed by ODIHR EOM observers. ODIHR EOM observers also reported a few isolated indications of intimidation of voters in and around polling stations. In 6 per cent of observed polling stations, persons other than EB members were keeping track of who voted, although this appeared to be done mainly in order to track voter turnout.

ODIHR EOM observers reported that 5 per cent of polling stations observed were overcrowded. Some 53 per cent of polling stations were not independently accessible for persons with physical disabilities, and in 26 per cent, the layout was not suitable for such voters. Nine per cent of polling stations observed did not have a Braille ballot frame for use by voters with visual impairments.

Authorized candidate representatives were present in 89 per cent of observed polling stations; in 4 per cent, persons other than EB members, mostly candidate representatives, interfered in or directed the voting process. Citizen observers were only present in 10 per cent and at times appeared to be *de facto* party observers.

The vote count was assessed positively in 49 of the 61 polling stations where it was observed, but ODIHR EOM observers reported that many EBs failed to follow established procedures. Authorized candidate representatives were present at 48 observed vote counts, and citizen observers at only 5. ODIHR EOM observers reported ten cases of undue interference in the count, all by candidate representatives. ODIHR EOM observers reported frequent cases in which EBs failed to follow basic reconciliation procedures before opening the ballot boxes, or where the number of voters' signatures on the voter list, BVID data on turnout, and the number of unused ballots did not match. ODIHR EOM observers reported from 8 counts that figures had not been entered accurately in the results protocols. Persons other than EB members participated in 14 counts, and in 9 polling stations, EB members had pre-signed the results protocol. Thirty-one EBs observed had problems completing the results protocols, mostly due to lack of understanding of procedures. In 25 polling stations, the EB did not post copies of the protocols for public display.

While ODIHR EOM observers assessed that the determination of ballot validity had been generally reasonable and consistent, significant numbers of invalid ballots were noted throughout the country.¹⁰⁵ ODIHR EOM interlocutors attributed the high numbers of invalid ballots to various reasons, some pointing out insufficient understanding of the procedure for marking ballots among voters as a result of scarce voter education, while others attributed it in part to intentional spoiling of ballots as a protest vote against all contestants. The Electoral Code stipulates a circle around the contestant's ordinal number on the ballot as the only valid mark, while at the same time indicating that a ballot should be considered valid if the will of voter can be established in a clear and unambiguous manner. ODIHR EOM observers reported on several instances when ballots with a clear intention of the voter (another marking than a circle, or a circle around something other than the ordinal number) were invalidated. The Electoral Code does not provide for replacement ballots in case voters spoil their ballots unintentionally.

As previously recommended, consideration should be given to clarifying the rules to preserve the validity of ballots on which the voters' will is clearly expressed. Consideration should also be given to allowing for the replacement of accidentally spoiled ballots.

The tabulation process was assessed negatively in 13 of the 57 reports submitted by ODIHR EOM observers from a total of 53 MECs. In around one half of MECs observed, conditions were not adequate for the handover of election materials and tabulation (32 reports). The process in many MECs was negatively affected by poor organization (16 reports), insufficient space (22 reports), and overcrowding (26 reports). Respect for COVID-19 prevention measures was significantly lower than during voting. Tabulation procedures were mostly followed, although procedural omissions or violations were reported from nine MECs. In more than three-quarters of observations of tabulation, polling station results protocols were found to contain minor discrepancies. ODIHR EOM observers reported one case of interference in the tabulation process, while there were seven reports of tension or unrest in or around a MEC.

To ensure consistency and transparency in the results tabulation process, clear procedures for rectifying errors and discrepancies in result protocols should be established and followed, including criteria for the recounts of ballots. All relevant data collected during election day, including the

¹⁰⁵ In the first round of mayoral elections, a total of 5.2 per cent of ballots cast were deemed invalid. The highest rates were recorded in the municipalities of Shuto Orizari with almost 9.9 per cent, Jegunovce with 8.3 per cent, and Butel with 7.2 per cent.

number of voters added to the voter lists, should be published by the State Election Commission in a timely manner.

B. ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINAL FIRST-ROUND RESULTS

The final first-round results of the 17 October local elections were confirmed and announced by the SEC on 23 and 26 October.¹⁰⁶ After the announcement by the SEC, MECs and the ECCS should announce detailed final results at the level of the municipality or the City of Skopje within 24 hours. Thirty-four mayors were elected in the first round.¹⁰⁷ In the municipalities of Centar Zhupa and of Mavrovo and Rostusha, the legal requirement that one third of registered voters turn out for the mayoral election to be valid was not met; the mayoral elections in these two municipalities will be repeated on 17 April 2022.

In line with the law, the SEC scheduled a second round of mayoral elections for 31 October in the City of Skopje and 43 municipalities.¹⁰⁸ Of the 88 mayoral candidates contesting the second round, 6 were independents. Of the 25 women candidates for mayor, none were elected in the first round, and only 6 advanced to the second round. In the municipality of Debar, the mayoral election was repeated on 31 October in one polling station where the first round had been annulled.

C. SECOND ROUND

In line with ODIHR methodology in the absence of short-term observers for the second round, the ODIHR EOM did not observe election-day proceedings on 31 October in a systematic or comprehensive manner, but mission members visited a limited number of polling stations in the city of Skopje and 17 municipalities. In the limited number of polling stations visited, the voting process was generally assessed as well-organized, transparent and calm. Established procedures were largely followed, but in a few cases the secrecy of the vote was not fully respected. Some issues observed in the first round persisted in the visited polling stations, including the biometric identification devices often failing to successfully scan voters' fingerprints. According to the SEC, polling was extended for more than one hour in 12 polling stations due to suspension of the voting process caused by the malfunction of the BVIDs. Several cases of violation of the campaign silence were noted. Mitigating measures against COVID-19 were in place, but social distancing was not always respected, and personal protective equipment was not consistently used. The few vote counts observed were mostly transparent, but respect for established procedures varied considerably between the visited polling stations, and some EBs had problems completing the results protocol.

The SEC announced that voter turnout was 49.65 per cent.¹⁰⁹ As in the first round, the SEC shared updates about the voting process throughout election day and began posting preliminary results by polling station on its website shortly after the close of polls, which enhanced transparency.

The SEC and the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported isolated incidents during the second-round election day.¹¹⁰ The State Public Prosecutor's Office announced that it had received some reports on

¹⁰⁶ The SEC announced most results on 23 October; the results of four mayoral and seven council elections were announced after the expiration of relevant adjudication deadlines.

¹⁰⁷ Of these, 22 were candidates of VMRO-DPMNE, 9 of SDSM, and 3 of DUI. Among larger municipalities, only Prilep, Shtip, Veles, and the Skopje municipalities of Gazi Baba and Aerodrom elected their mayors in the first round.

¹⁰⁸ In Shuto Orizari, the second round of the mayoral election took place on 31 October, and in one polling station where the first round of voting had been invalidated, voters also voted for the municipal council and the council of the City of Skopje.

¹⁰⁹ The SEC on election night announced a preliminary turnout of 48.61 per cent, as of 18:30 hrs.

¹¹⁰ On the second-round election day, the MoIA announced that it had increased police presence following some reports of obstruction of the election process.

potential criminal conduct during election day, most concerning alleged vote-buying and pressure on voters, as well as threats addressed to citizen observers on social media, with a criminal investigation ordered in all cases. The SEC and the Ombudsperson's Office operated dedicated hotlines where voters could report possible violations and obstructions of their voting rights.

D. POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

The final results of the runoffs and repeated first rounds were progressively confirmed and announced by the SEC during its sessions held on 3, 4 and 9 November. As after the first round, MECs and the ECCS had 24 hours from the announcement by the SEC to announce detailed final results at the level of the municipality or the City of Skopje. The second round for the mayoral election in the municipality of Debar, where the repeated first-round election in one polling station did not result in the election of a new mayor, was scheduled for 14 November. The final results for the mayoral election in Debar were announced by the SEC on 24 November.

Following the announcement of the second-round preliminary results, Zoran Zaev at a press conference on election night announced his resignation as prime minister and president of SDSM. On 4 November, the VMRO-DPMNE leadership called for early parliamentary elections and the formation of a new parliamentary majority and a new government, stating that the incumbent authorities had been delegitimized by the result of the local elections. Conversely, most of the parties in the governing coalition reinforced its stability and rejected the possibility of early elections, citing the EU summit in December and the need for continuity given the possible start of accession talks. On 10 November, Mr. Zaev said that he would stay on as prime minister and as party president until the political situation stabilized.¹¹¹ A no-confidence vote in the government tabled by VMRO-DPMNE was not put to a vote by parliament on 11 November as scheduled, due to a lack of quorum.

XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to enhance the conduct of elections in the Republic of 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 prior ODIHR recommendations, which remain to be addressed.¹¹² ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of

¹¹¹ On 10 November, Mr. Zaev [stated](#) he will stay in post “to help stabilize the parliamentary majority and possibly increase it” (link in Macedonian). On 12 December, Deputy Finance Minister Dimitar Kovachevski was elected by membership vote as the new SDSM president and became prime minister on 16 January 2022.

¹¹² According to paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”. The follow-up of prior recommendations is assessed by ODIHR as follows: The recommendations 14 and 19 from the final report on the 2017 local elections are fully implemented. The recommendations 11, 13 and 21 from the final report on the 2017 local elections are mostly implemented. The recommendations 3, 4, 5, 12, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 from the final report on the 2017 local elections are partially implemented. The recommendation 9 from the final report on the 2018 referendum is fully implemented. No recommendations from the final report on the 2018 referendum are mostly implemented. The recommendations 3, 6, 10, 11 and 17 from the final report on the 2018 referendum are partially implemented. The recommendation 22 from the final report on the 2019 presidential election is fully implemented. No recommendations from the final report on the 2019 presidential election are mostly implemented. The recommendations 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 24 and 27 from the final report on the 2019 presidential election are partially implemented. The recommendation 23 from the final report on the 2020 early parliamentary elections is fully implemented. The recommendation 2 from the final report on the 2020 early parliamentary elections is mostly implemented. The recommendations 11, 12, 17 and 28 from the final report on the 2020 early parliamentary elections are partially implemented. See also the ODIHR [Electoral Recommendations Database](#).

North Macedonia to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The legal framework should be comprehensively revised to address all outstanding ODIHR recommendations and to eliminate the numerous existing gaps and inconsistencies. The parliament should undertake this revision well before the next elections, following an open and inclusive consultation process in which the proposals by all stakeholders are given meaningful consideration.
2. Continued vigorous efforts should be made by the authorities to counter any form of pressure on voters and on public and private-sector employees, including buying of votes. In line with existing legislation, reports of pressure and vote buying should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted, with protection for those who reported. Public institutions should be proactive in informing public and state employees of independent mechanisms where they can report pressure in relation with elections, and senior state officials should issue clear public statements and written instructions that such actions will not be tolerated and that no citizen should fear any negative consequences as a result of supporting or not supporting any candidate or party.
3. To ensure the operational independence and efficiency of the State Election Commission, the authorities should guarantee that it receives an adequate and timely budget allocation. The capacities of the Commission's personnel should match the responsibilities vested in the Commission under the Electoral Code, with essential staff employed on a permanent basis.
4. As previously recommended, the legal framework should be harmonized with international standards by removing all restrictions on electoral rights on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability.
5. The accuracy of the voter register should be reinforced through systematic and electronic data updates, most notably for deaths and name changes, and the implementation of a co-ordinated nationwide system for the standardization of addresses.
6. To enhance transparency, the Electoral Code should require comprehensive disclosure of all types of campaign income, as well as expenditures by contestants, several days before election day. Campaign finance reports should include a breakdown of expenditures by constituency, and the deadline for submitting final reports should be shortened to reflect international good practice. In line with a prior recommendation, a mechanism for electronic submission of financial reports could be established.
7. Provisions regulating the public broadcaster's newscasts during the campaign period should be revised, with a view to allow for editorial freedom and ensure equitable access and news coverage of smaller parties and independent candidates. Further reforms should aim at strengthening the quality of content produced by the public broadcaster, including investigative and analytical journalism.
8. Regulations on paid political advertisement in the media should be reconsidered, in order to allow unimpeded access to the media based on reasonable and objective criteria. A clear mechanism for dividing the budget among smaller parties and independent candidates should be established. The official decision on budget allocation for campaign advertisement in the media should be published in a timely manner.

9. The legal standing to file complaints should be extended to voters and citizen observers. To allow adequate time for the filing and handling of complaints, deadlines could be brought in line with international good practice.

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal Framework and Electoral system

10. The law should stipulate a clear timeframe for the holding of repeat elections in cases where the turnout requirement was not met in the first round of a mayoral election. To reduce the risk of failed elections, the voter turnout requirement for repeat elections could be reconsidered.

Election Administration

11. To enhance transparency and public confidence in their work, the State Election Commission and Municipal Election Commissions should publish all relevant documentation, such as budget, procurement plan, as well as all regulations and decisions in a consistent and timely manner.
12. The authorities should ensure adequate and timely financial and operational support to Municipal Election Commissions well ahead of election day. Communication and instructions from the State Election Commission to lower-level election bodies should be complete and timely, in order to ensure due co-ordination and unified implementation of procedures.
13. As previously recommended, the database of state and public employees used for the selection of election officials should be updated, in order to ensure a smooth and efficient selection process. The pool of institutions from which employees are called to serve on election bodies could be revised.
14. In a coordinated effort, state and local authorities as well as other actors involved in the election process should undertake further measures to ensure independent access of persons with various types of disabilities to the entire election process.

Voter Registration

15. The regulatory framework for voter registration procedures should be consolidated and harmonized to eliminate inconsistencies.
16. The authorities should take the appropriate measures necessary to ensure that all eligible voters are included in the voter register and the voter lists. The Electoral Code should be amended accordingly, including by removing restrictions based on expired identification documents, and by clarifying procedures for the inclusion in voter lists of persons who turn 18 between rounds.
17. To ensure meaningful access to and transparency of the voter register and voter lists, the SEC should publish voter registration data disaggregated by polling station, periodically and before and after each election, while limiting the type of voters' personal data made publicly available and introducing technical safeguards to prevent its unauthorized processing.

18. To ensure integrity and public confidence in the election process, the use of new technologies, including biometric identification devices, should be introduced after sufficient time and with detailed provisions to ensure adequate testing and for all stakeholders to be acquainted with the operation of such equipment.

Candidate Registration

19. To ensure equal opportunities in the right to stand for all candidates, the required number of supporting signatures for independent candidates should be proportional to the actual number of registered voters per constituency. Consideration could be given to standardizing them at up to one per cent of registered voters, in line with international good practice.
20. The legal framework should be amended to provide for possibilities for independent councilor candidates to contest an election individually.

Campaign

21. In line with the principle of equality of opportunity, campaign rules should be revised to provide for more equitable access to the media and allocation of spaces for posters and billboards for small parties and independent candidates.
22. Political parties and relevant state and public institutions should take further steps to encourage the participation of women in the electoral process and in political decision-making.
23. The legal framework for campaigning should be further amended to include clear rules for the participation of public officials, including on social networks.

Campaign Finance

24. The legal framework for campaign finance should be revised to address existing gaps, including those concerning the amount of bank loans and the possibility to donate after elections, as well as third-party financing. To prevent undue influence by private donors and potential political corruption, donation and expenditure limits for local elections could be aligned so that a contestant's campaign fund is not sourced from a single donation.
25. The agencies responsible for campaign finance oversight should conduct an effective scrutiny of campaign income and spending throughout the electoral process and should give proper and timely consideration to all reports and complaints concerning alleged irregularities.

Media

26. National broadcasters should endeavour to make their programmes accessible for persons with sensory impairments. Consideration could be given to amend the Electoral Code in order to provide clearer and more specific guidance on transmitting accessible information to the electorate.
27. The legal requirement on daily reporting by the media regulator to the election administration could be replaced by *ad hoc* reports addressing specific election-related concerns.

Complaints and Appeals

28. To ensure effective remedy, the law should provide for timely judicial review of all election-related administrative decisions, including all State Election Commission regulations.
29. Rules on the admissibility of complaints should establish reasonable requirements, and the scope of admissible evidence should not be unduly limited. Decisions of the election administration should be reasoned, ensuring effective examination of the merits of all complaints.
30. To increase transparency and ensure due process, the right to a public hearing involving both parties should be protected at both courts and election commissions.
31. Consideration could be given to strengthening the Municipal Election Commissions' capacity and relevant procedures for handling complaints. The electronic system for filing and tracking complaints could be upgraded to provide timely updates of submitted complaints and increase transparency.

Citizen and International Observers

32. Election administration bodies at all levels should ensure unimpeded access of all accredited observers to the entire election process. To enhance transparency, the election administration should keep records of all observers and contestants' representatives accredited to observe, make these available to the public in a timely manner and provide those accredited with proper identification, clearly indicating their names and affiliation.

Election Day

33. To enhance the integrity of and trust in the voting process, the authorities should undertake comprehensive efforts to improve the quality of databases used for voter identification on election day and the functionality of the biometric voter identification system.
34. To enhance the credibility and ensure the integrity of the biometric voter identification system, the State Election Commission should publish the number of voters who were identified by the equipment, per constituency and polling station, as part of the announcement of preliminary results.
35. As previously recommended, consideration should be given to clarifying the rules to preserve the validity of ballots on which the voters' will is clearly expressed. Consideration should also be given to allowing for the replacement of accidentally spoiled ballots.
36. To ensure consistency and transparency in the results tabulation process, clear procedures for rectifying errors and discrepancies in result protocols should be established, including criteria for the recounts of ballots. All relevant data collected during election day, including the number of voters added to the voter lists, should be published by the SEC in a timely manner.

ANNEX I: ELECTION RESULTS

FIRST ROUND, 17 OCTOBER 2021

General voter registration data	Number
Registered voters on the voter list	1,824,864
Registered voters on the in-country voter list	1,740,147
Registered voters on the list of voters temporarily residing abroad	82,461
Registered voters for early voting	10,653
Voters added to the voter lists on election day	495

ELECTIONS TO MUNICIPAL COUNCILS, 17 OCTOBER 2021¹¹³

Contestant	Total number of votes cast	Number of municipal councils with elected councilors	Councilors	
			Total number	Female councilors
Civil Option for Macedonia – GROM	2,689	1	2	1
Decisive for Change – LDP/DOM	34,367	19	24	4
Democratic Union for Integration – DUI	130,003	31	167	60
Coalition “Everyone Together” – DUI / AA/A	1,339	1	4	1
Alliance of Albanians and AlternAtivaA – AA/A	65,605	24	80	23
VMRO-DPMNE and Coalition “Renewal of Macedonia”	355,262	72	469	182
Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia – DPTM	9,780	6	16	3
AlternAtivaA	370	1	1	–
Democratic Party of Albanians – DPA	8,398	3	9	1
SDSM-led Coalition “The Best for My Municipality”	233,443	78	396	171
Party for Movement of Turks in Macedonia – PDT	1,591	2	2	–
Levica	69,346	26	49	14
Movement BESA	26,751	15	35	8

¹¹³ Including results of the repeated elections in two polling stations for municipal councils of Debar and Shuto Orizari and the Council of the City of Skopje, held on 31 October.

Contestant	Total number of votes cast	Number of municipal councils with elected councilors	Councilors	
			Total number	Female councilors
United Macedonia – EM	4,092	1	1	–
Union of Roma in Macedonia – SRM	956	1	2	–
Bosniak Democratic Union – BDS	3,545	1	1	–
Movement for National Unity of Turks – DNET	1,422	1	2	–
ROM – Romeske	531	1	1	–
Permanent Macedonian Radical Unification – TMRO	3,317	2	3	1
Party of United Democrats – PODEM	789	1	1	–
Democratic Forces of Roma – DSR	865	1	1	–
Movement for Democracy, Rights, and Freedom – DDPS	436	1	1	–
Independent candidates	65,908	34	67	21
General data			Number	Per cent
Total of votes cast (<i>including for the Council of the City of Skopje</i>)			1,167,275	–
Total of invalid votes			55,032	4,71

MAYORAL ELECTIONS, 17 OCTOBER 2021¹¹⁴

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes Cast	Per cent	Total	Per cent
Aerodrom	66,905	51.14	8,973	26.22	18,857	55.11									4,974	14.54	1,413	4.13
Arachinovo	10,026	51.63	2,023	39.08			2,286	44.17	764	14.76							95	1.84
Berovo	10,758	60.83	3,354	51.25	2,551	39.98									238	3.64	401	6.13
Bitola	80,882	56.64	17,926	39.23	19,571	42.83							1,082	2.37	4,454	9.75	2,659	5.82

¹¹⁴ Including results of the repeated first round of elections in one polling station in Debar.

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes Cast	Per cent	Total	Per cent
Bogdanci	6,633	63.00	2,128	50.92	1,748	41.83							86	2.06			235	5.62
Bogovinje	28,307	36.92					4,942	47.29	2,878	27.54	2,035	19.47			331	3.17	264	2.53
Bosilovo	12,334	57.77	2,708	38.01	4,156	58.33											262	3.68
Brvenica	15,732	43.97	1,051	15.19	2,052	29.67	1,065	15.40	876	12.66			1,319	19.07	320	4.63	234	3.38
Butel	33,364	51.17	6,831	40.01	9,012	52.79											1,229	7.20
Centar	43,951	51.04	9,026	40.24	7,462	33.27									4,689	20.90	1,254	5.59
Centar Zhupa	7,317	25.78	<i>Election invalidated due to insufficient voter turnout</i>															
Chair	58,208	46.01					13,020	48.87	9,849	36.97	1,071	4.02			843	3.16	1,859	6.98
Chashka	6,171	69.37	1,688	39.43	1,088	25.41	1,436	33.54									76	1.78
Cheshinovo - Oblsehevo	5,390	67.66	1,386	38.00	1,511	41.43									625	17.14	125	3.43
Chucher - Sandevo	7,936	58.59	1,929	41.48									2,485	53.44			236	5.08
Debar*	19,211	42.11					3,747	46.32	4,021	49.70					35	0.43	287	3.55
Debarca	4,350	65.49	979	34.36	734	25.76							1,053	36.96			83	2.91
Delchevo	14,757	58.30	4,389	51.14	3,635	42.35											559	6.51
Demir Hisar	6,965	73.71	2,432	47.37	2,409	46.92											293	5.71
Demir Kapija	3,250	77.26	1,219	48.59	1,194	47.59											98	3.91
Dojran	2,677	74.41	1,060	53.21	802	40.26									51	2.56	79	3.97
Dolneni	11,840	60.53	1,521	21.22	1,347	18.79	2,047	28.56			198	2.76			1,822	25.42	232	3.24
Gazi Baba	61,413	48.68	8,804	29.45	17,910	59.91									1,118	3.74	2,020	6.76

¹¹⁵ Total for three independent candidates running, out of which Jovan Pejkovski advanced to the second round with 1,963 votes, i.e. 42.22 per cent.

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes Cast	Per cent	Total	Per cent
Gevgelija	19,076	67.48	4,465	34.69	6,064	47.11							504	3.92	1,128	8.76	711	5.52
Gjorche Petrov	38,529	50.52	6,597	33.89	9,779	50.24									2,355	12.10	736	3.78
Gostivar	81,083	39.02					13,190	41.69	15,724	49.70	909	2.87			333	1.05	1,368	4.32
Gradsko	3,113	66.95	841	40.36	1,160	55.66											83	3.98
Ilinden	14,312	63.58	1,815	19.95	4,861	53.42							2,081	14.54			346	3.80
Jegunovce	10,225	46.81	1,976	41.29	2,412	50.40											398	8.32
Karbinci	3,215	72.47	829	35.58	1,384	59.40											117	5.02
Karposh	54,639	52.86	9,311	32.24	6,560	22.71									11,505	39.84	1,504	5.21
Kavadarci	32,163	65.25	4,677	22.29	15,182	72.35											1,126	5.37
Kichevo	50,746	45.14			8,801	38.42	8,545	37.30					4,527	19.76	137	0.60	898	3.92
Kisela Voda	53,167	52.80	7,691	27.40	14,691	52.34									4,402	15.68	1,201	4.28
Kochani	32,972	50.15	8,028	48.55	7,425	44.90											1,082	6.54
Konche	2,769	74.65	968	46.83	859	41.56									172	8.32	67	3.24
Kratovo	7,862	61.91	1,445	29.69	2,378	48.86							781	16.05			261	5.36
Kriva Palanka	16,849	68.54	6,321	54.73	4,032	34.91									755	6.54	441	3.82
Krivogashani	4,637	74.92	1,766	50.83	1,438	41.39									166	4.78	104	2.99
Krushevo	7,955	70.06	2,937	52.70	2,314	41.52											322	5.78
Kumanovo	93,986	49.21	15,142	32.74	8,582	18.56			4,257	9.20			15,164	32.79			2,076	4.49
Lipkovo	26,042	37.49					7,087	72.59	1,664	17.04	544	5.57			189	1.94	279	2.86

¹¹⁶ Total for two independent candidates running, out of which Zhika Stojanovski advanced to the second round with 1,821 votes, i.e. 20.01 per cent.

¹¹⁷ Total for four other partisan candidates running, out of which the candidate of GROM advanced to the second round with 6,841 votes, i.e. 23.69 per cent.

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes Cast	Per cent	Total	Per cent
Lozovo	1,984	78.23	695	44.78	428	27.58							268	17.27	87	5.60	74	4.77
Makedonska Kamenica	6,735	59.64	1,270	31.62	1,198	29.82							1,236	30.77			235	5.85
Makedonski Brod	4,978	76.18	1,025	27.03	1,418	37.39							1,198	31.59			151	3.98
Mavrovo and Rostusha	10,144	32.00	<i>Election invalidated due to insufficient voter turnout</i>															
Mogila	5,195	71.01	1,358	36.81	2,113	57.28									72	1.95	146	3.96
Negotino	15,983	70.53	4,839	42.93	5,855	51.94											579	5.14
Novaci	2,868	74.37	943	44.21	1,094	51.29									30	1.41	66	3.09
Novo Selo	11,309	44.50	2,391	47.51	2,460	48.88											182	3.62
Ohrid	52,477	56.54	12,460	42.00	14,380	48.47									1,376	4.64	1,412	4.76
Pehchevo	4,072	68.25	1,107	39.83	1,076	38.72							516	18.57			80	2.88
Petrovec	7,824	59.30	1,195	25.75	2,964	63.88									225	4.85	256	5.52
Plasnica	5,122	34.65					1,359	76.56							366	20.62	48	2.70
Prilep	63,436	63.80	14,655	36.21	22,196	54.84							1,071	2.65	901	2.23	1,649	4.07
Probishtip	12,545	68.30	4,230	49.41	3,766	43.99											565	6.60
Radovish	24,540	52.21	3,280	25.86	4,894	38.58							2,071	16.33	1,895	14.94	545	4.30
Rankovce	3,014	74.68	871	38.69	959	42.60							319	14.17	45	2.00	57	2.53
Resen	16,378	52.17	3,533	41.35	3,342	39.11	800	9.36							402	4.70	468	5.48
Rosoman	3,343	75.68	1,148	45.38	947	37.43							313	12.37			122	4.82
Saraj	32,967	44.78					10,790	73.10	2,606	17.65	893	6.05			87	0.59	385	2.61

¹¹⁸ Total for three independent candidates running.

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes		
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Total	Per cent	
Shtip	42,045	57.53	9,242	38.21	13,104	54.18									692	2.86	1,153	4.77	
Shuto Orizari*	24,230	36.52	3,280	37.07											4,663	119	53.15	878	9.92
Sopishte	5,219	63.67	986	29.67	2,161	65.03											176	5.30	
Staro Nagorichane	3,262	58.71	949	49.56	383	20.00									510	26.63	73	3.81	
Struga	61,437	41.36	4,352	17.13			10,956	43.12	9,421	37.08	486	1.91			888	3.49	1,305	5.14	
Strumica	49,800	51.46	13,760	53.70	10,291	40.16									346	1.35	1,228	4.79	
Studenichani	16,593	45.70					2,440	32.18	1,781	23.49					3,146	41.49	216	2.85	
Sveti Nikole	14,567	62.95	2,964	32.32	4,766	51.97							987	10.76			453	4.94	
Tearce	22,450	41.67					3,818	40.82	2,362	25.25	1,969	21.05			683	7.30	522	5.58	
Tetovo	85,577	44.81	2,373	6.19			11,138	29.04	6,165	16.08	10,496	27.37			6,207	16.19	1,971	5.14	
Valandovo	9,992	65.92	3,798	57.73	2,455	37.32											326	4.96	
Vasilevo	10,688	59.23	3,035	47.94	3,090	48.81											206	3.25	
Veles	45,892	52.22	7,789	32.50	12,381	51.67									2,819	11.77	974	4.06	
Vevchani	2,075	75.28	698	44.69	776	49.68											88	5.63	
Vinica	17,244	52.64	3,592	39.56	4,970	54.74											519	5.72	
Vrapchishte	26,383	36.15	267	2.80			3,298	34.58	3,946	41.38	309	3.24	115	1.21	1,354	14.19	248	2.60	
Zelenikovo	3,738	61.29	1,015	44.30	1,040	45.40									154	6.72	82	3.58	
Zhelino	24,485	37.62					4,296	46.63	785	8.52	3,877	42.09			119	1.29	135	1.47	
Zrnovci	2,556	56.03	581	40.57	781	54.54											70	4.89	

¹¹⁹ Total for four other partisan candidates running, out of which candidate of LDP/DOM advanced to the second round with 2,246 votes, i.e. 25.38 per cent.

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes Cast	Per cent	Total	Per cent
City of Skopje	467,373	49.23	78,783	34.24									96,652 120	42.0 1	38,654 121	16.81	16,012	6.96
Total	1,824,864	51.44	346,700		319,249		106,260		67,099		22,787		133,828		106,363		60,768	5.20

¹²⁰ Total for two independent candidates running, out of which Danela Arsovska advanced to the second round with 86,698 votes, i.e. 37.68 per cent.

¹²¹ Total for nine other partisan candidates running.

SECOND ROUND, 31 OCTOBER 2021

General voter registration data	Number
Registered voters on the voter list entitled to vote in the second round	1,335,556
Registered voters for early voting	7,645
Voters added to the voter lists on election day	684

MAYORAL ELECTIONS, SECOND ROUND, 31 OCTOBER 2021¹²²

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	
Arachinovo	10,026	59.71	2,873	47.99			3,026	50.54									88	1.47
Bitola	80,882	60.21	21,978	45.13	24,708	50.73											2,016	4.14
Bogovinje	28,307	35.93					6,336	62.30	3,696	36.34							138	1.36
Brvenica	15,732	45.12			3,486	49.11							3,450	48.61			162	2.28
Centar	43,951	52.55	11,982	51.88	10,016	43.99											954	4.13
Chair	58,208	45.53					14,647	55.27	10,581	39.93							1,274	4.81
Chashka	6,171	67.25	2,327	56.07			1,734	41.78									89	2.14
Cheshinovo - Oblsehevo	5,390	71.15	1,693	44.15	2,030	52.93											112	2.92
Chucher - Sandevo	7,936	64.83	2,610	50.73									2,407	46.78			128	2.49
Debar*	19,211	44.95					4,291	49.69	4,153	48.09							192	2.22
Debarca	4,350	65.56	1,276	44.74									1,506	52.81			70	2.45
Demir Hisar	6,965	77.44	2,524	46.79	2,681	49.70											189	3.50
Demir Kapija	3,250	81.69	1,323	49.83	1,287	48.47											45	1.69

¹²²

Including results of the second round in the municipality of Debar, held on 14 October.

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	
Dolneni	11,840	57.09	3,053	45.16			3,467	51.29									240	3.55
Gevgelija	19,076	69.54	5,130	38.67	7,546	56.88											590	4.45
Gostivar	81,083	39.92					12,982	40.11	18,685	57.73							698	2.16
Karposh	54,639	54.84	13,420	44.79											14,864 (GROM)	49.61	1,678	5.60
Kichevo	50,746	48.11			10,828	44.35	12,935	52.98									651	2.67
Kochani	32,972	54.62	8,681	48.20	8,697	48.29											631	3.50
Konche	2,769	78.40	1,060	48.83	1,083	49.88											28	1.29
Kratovo	7,862	65.34	1,869	36.38	3,078	59.92											190	3.70
Kumanovo	93,986	49.23	19,468	42.07									25,587	55.30			1,218	2.63
Lozovo	1,984	79.03	744	47.45	783	49.94											41	2.61
Makedonska Kamenica	6,735	64.87	1,865	42.69	2,228	51.00											276	6.32
Makedonski Brod	4,978	78.06			1,903	48.97							1,876	48.28			107	2.75
Novo Selo	11,309	47.24	2,514	47.06	2,727	51.05											101	1.89
Ohrid	52,477	59.31	13,186	42.37	16,993	54.60											941	3.02
Pehchevo	4,072	71.86	1,346	46.00	1,499	51.23											81	2.77
Probishtip	12,545	74.76	4,649	49.57	4,338	46.25											392	4.18
Radovish	24,540	51.78	4,792	37.71	7,466	58.76											448	3.53
Rankovce	3,014	78.87	1,104	46.45	1,225	51.54											48	2.02
Resen	16,378	53.04	4,011	46.17	4,350	50.07											326	3.75
Rosoman	3,343	82.02	1,471	53.65	1,215	44.31											56	2.04
Shuto Orizari	24,230	33.47	3,509	43.27											4,170 (LDP/DOM)	51.42	426	5.25
Staro Nagorichane	3,262	59.35	1,076	55.58											811 (TMRO)	41.89	49	2.53
Struga	61,437	43.02					13,763	52.07	11,711	44.31							956	3.62

Municipality	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	SDSM Coalition		VMRO-DPMNE Coalition		DUI		Coalition of AA/A		BESA		Independent		Other		Invalid votes	
			Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent					Votes cast	Per cent	Votes cast	Per cent
Studenichani	16,593	49.91					4,060	49.02							4,119 (DPA)	49.73	103	1.24
Tearce	22,450	37.38					4,687	55.86	3,557	42.39							147	1.75
Tetovo	85,577	46.01					16,542	42.02			21,591	54.84					1,238	3.14
Vasilevo	10,688	63.33	3,306	48.84	3,332	49.22											131	1.94
Vevchani	2,075	81.83	796	46.88	856	50.41											46	2.71
Vrapchishte	26,383	38.05					4,770	47.51	5,119	50.99							150	1.49
Zelenikovo	3,738	67.90	1,177	46.38	1,308	51.54											53	2.09
Zhelino	24,485	42.27					5,102	49.29			5,171	49.96					78	0.75
City of Skopje	467,373	46.49	90,662	41.72									118,792	54.67			7,843	3.61
Total	1,335,556	49.65	146,813		125,663		108,342		57,502		26,762		153,618		23,964		25,418	2.89

ANNEX II: LIST OF OBSERVERS IN THE ODIHR ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

ODIHR EOM Short-term Observers

Dhimiter	GJODEDE	Albania
Andon	KUME	Albania
Erion	META	Albania
Elshan	ASGAROV	Azerbaijan
Ramil	ISKANDARLI	Azerbaijan
Ramin	NURALIYEV	Azerbaijan
Abbas	PANAHOV	Azerbaijan
Kilian	DE SAEGER	Belgium
Lore	HENS	Belgium
Bojan	DOKIC	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Milica	MITROVIĆ	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Dijana	TABORI DOROVIĆ	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mubera	VULOVIĆ	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Gabriela	NIKOLOVA	Bulgaria
Ivana	VEJIĆ	Croatia
Martina	MATULÍKOVÁ	Czech Republic
Petr	ŠMEJKAL	Czech Republic
Lukáš	TESKA	Czech Republic
Martin	TUŠL	Czech Republic
Claus Thomas	DETHLEFSEN	Denmark
Michael		
Peter	HELLMERS	Denmark
Peder	LARSEN	Denmark
Kirsten	LIND	Denmark
Hanne	RODEN	Denmark
Hanne	SEVERINSEN	Denmark
Erik	THAU-KNUDSEN	Denmark
Christina Helena	JÜRGENSON	Estonia
Gerda		
Timothée	DEMEILLERS	France
Guillaume	JAVOUREZ	France
Marion	JOUANNET	France
Amandine Charlotte	MARQUES	France
Stephanie	MARSAL	France
Marine	MATHÉ	France
Mounir	ZAÏR	France
Claus	AUER	Germany
Eva	CREYDT	Germany
Kai	FRANKE	Germany
Harald	HAENDEL	Germany
Caspar Johannes	HAMACHER	Germany
Nico	HEINEMANN	Germany
Henry	JUNG	Germany
Christian	KONRAD	Germany

Isabella	LAUBER	Germany
Karla	MARKERT	Germany
Lisa Helen	NASER	Germany
Ulrike	NEUNDORF	Germany
Reinhold	OSTERHUS	Germany
Rainer	OTTER	Germany
Cosima	PEISSKER-MEYER	Germany
Christine	RADOMSKY	Germany
Marielle Véronique	RATTER	Germany
Claudia	SCHÄFER	Germany
Ursula	SCHULZE- ABOUBACAR	Germany
Manuel	SEIFERT BONIFAZ	Germany
Stephani	STRELOKE	Germany
Peter	VOGL	Germany
Jürgen	WAYAND	Germany
Anna	FÜLÖP	Hungary
Viktoria	OLAH	Hungary
Balogh	ZOLTAN	Hungary
Nicolae	PANFIL	Moldova
Corneliu	PASAT	Moldova
Alexandru	SIMIONOV	Moldova
Grigore	STEGARESCU	Moldova
Ana	ĆUPIĆ	Montenegro
Milivoje	KRIVOKAPIC	Montenegro
Marija	LATKOVIC	Montenegro
Leonardus	DEN BIGGELAAR	Netherlands
Wilhelmus		
Thomas	HERMANS	Netherlands
Wilma	THEUWS	Netherlands
Charlotte	WAGENAAR	Netherlands
Dag	HALVORSEN	Norway
Kristin	HAUGE	Norway
Carl	PETERSEN	Norway
Gent	RAMADANI	Norway
Lana	AVAKUMOVIĆ	Serbia
Marko	BRKIĆ	Serbia
Vuk	MARIČIĆ	Serbia
Ana	MIHAJLOVIĆ	Serbia
Maja	BALANT SLOBOĐANAC	Slovenia
Samo	RUS	Slovenia
David	CORRAL HERNÁNDEZ	Spain
Jesus Antonio	CORTIÑAS- GUNTÍN	Spain

Jorge	ESTÉVEZ RODRÍGUEZ	Spain
Manuela	ROJAS SANTIAGO	Spain
Ursula	URDILLO LORENZO	Spain
Eva	DALEKANT	Sweden
Bengt	FRYKMAN	Sweden
Anita Mikaela Johanna	JÄRNBERT	Sweden
André	NILÉN	Sweden
Eva	RIMSTEN	Sweden
Helen	RONEN	Sweden
Manne Olof Oscar	WÄNGBORG	Sweden
Sascha	ALDERISI	Switzerland
Fabrizio Mario Giuseppe	COMANDINI	Switzerland
Johanna	ESTERMANN	Switzerland
Hans-Peter	PORTMANN	Switzerland
Halyna	BAKHMATOVA	Ukraine
Dina	MARTINA	Ukraine
Denys	RYBACHOK	Ukraine
Serhii	SERZHAN	Ukraine
Deborah	ALEXANDER	United States of America
Pedro	ALONSO	United States of America
Martha	BARBOSA	United States of America
Riccardo	CANNAVO	United States of America
John	CAVANAUGH	United States of America
Victoria	DONAHUE	United States of America
Megan	DUFFY	United States of America
Fred	FELLER	United States of America
Devontae	FREELAND	United States of America
Robert	FROST	United States of America
Rebecca	GRAHAM	United States of America
Andrew	GRIDINSKY	United States of America
Robert	HELWIG	United States of America
Mary-Margaret	HESSE	United States of America
Sheila	JAGHAB	United States of America
Oiena	LENNON	United States of America
Laura	LOCKARD	United States of America
Ann	MERRILL	United States of America
Cornelius	NOLEN	United States of America
Phebe	PHILIPS-ADEYELU	United States of America
Constance	ROBINSON	United States of America
Mary-Lynn	SFERRAZZA	United States of America
Jake	SLEGGERS	United States of America
Steven	SMITH	United States of America
James	WELLOCK	United States of America

ODIHR EOM Long-term Observers

Gazmend	AGAJ	Albania
Miroslav	BROZMAN	Czech Republic
Valdemar	URUBA	Czech Republic
Hanne	BANG	Denmark
Véronique	LASSERRE-FY	France
Khatchig	SOUKIASSIAN	France
Nadia	YAKHLAF- LALLEMAND	France
Hildegard	ROGLER-MOCHEL	Germany
Marie Luise	VON HALEM	Germany
Andras	RADVANSZKI	Hungary
Filip	PEJOVIĆ	Montenegro
Darko	PAVLOVIĆ	Netherlands
Kine	RUSTEN	Norway
Ružica	JOVANOVIĆ	Serbia
Sigrid Marie	UTTERMAN	Sweden
Christine	BEGUELIN SARGENTI	Switzerland
Raphaël	BERGER	Switzerland
Nataliia	KHARCHENKO	Ukraine
Azita	RANJBAR	United States of America
Patrick	REILLY	United States of America

ODIHR EOM Core Team

Tana	DE ZULUETA	Head of Mission	Italy
Armen	MAZMANYAN		Armenia
Marcela	MAŠKOVÁ		Czech Republic
Caroline	GONTHIER		France
Stefan	KRAUSE		Germany
Peter	MARRON		Ireland
Max	BADER		Netherlands
Malgorzata	FALECKA		Poland
Aleksandra	PECZSZ-OKOŃSKA		Poland
Daniela	DIACONU		Romania
Kira	KALININA		Russian Federation
Valentina	KREMLEVA		Russian Federation
Karolina	SEMINA		Russian Federation
Ranko	VUKČEVIĆ		Serbia
Oleksandr	STETSENKO		Ukraine
Wiktorija	WISLOWSKA		Ukraine
Nicholas	JAHN		United States of America

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, the 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 (www.osce.org/odihr).