



ODIHR ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

Republic of North Macedonia – Local Elections, Second Round, 2 November 2025

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The 2 November second-round mayoral elections offered voters a choice between distinct political alternatives, but not all candidates enjoyed equal campaign conditions. In particular, the deficient allocation formula for political advertising significantly distorted the playing field in the media in several mayoral elections. The campaign in most municipalities was competitive, but divisions along ethnic lines defined some contests. The continued involvement of government officials in the campaign, as well as persistent allegations of pressure on public-sector employees and voters, and numerous allegations of vote-buying, were of concern. The election administration managed preparations efficiently and transparently, despite important procedural aspects of the second round not being clearly regulated in law, and continued to enjoy the trust of most stakeholders. The State Election Commission's (SEC) handling of first-round complaints raised concerns about due process and the right to an effective remedy, while the Administrative Court reviewed appeals thoroughly and in accordance with established procedures in public sessions. Limited campaign finance reporting requirements and the absence of oversight actions undermined transparency and public trust and reduced accountability of the electoral process, contrary to international good practice. On election day, in the limited number of polling stations observed by the ODIHR EOM, the various stages of the process were assessed as well-organized, professional, and calm, with established procedures generally adhered to, although the tracking of voters was of concern.

Second rounds of mayoral elections took place in 32 municipalities and the City of Skopje, where no candidate had won an absolute majority in the first round on 19 October. Only one woman was elected as mayor in the first round, and three proceeded to the second round. Additionally, only one party representing a smaller ethnic community had a candidate in the second round.

While the Electoral Code regulates certain aspects of the second-round election process, several key areas remain unregulated, ambiguous, or insufficiently detailed. These include the absence of provisions defining the official start of the campaign for the second round, which affects campaign finance reporting requirements, campaign coverage, and media advertising rules. The law also lacks a clear timeline and detailed rules for technical preparations for voting.

The election administration continued to manage the electoral preparations efficiently and transparently, and overall enjoyed stakeholder trust. SEC sessions were open to media and observers and streamed online. Between the rounds, the SEC conducted refresher training sessions and consolidated the most frequently asked questions from lower-level election management bodies and distributed the responses as supplementary training material. The law does not provide for voter list updates between the rounds, except in cases where additional requests for homebound voting are submitted and where the SEC has issued decisions on voters' complaints concerning the violation of voting rights.

As in the first round, the fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression were respected, and contestants were able to campaign freely. The campaign was competitive, and voters had a genuine choice between political alternatives. The tone of the campaign was more restrained than in the first round, but it was at times inflammatory, with some instances of personal attacks. The continuing involvement of government officials in the campaign at times blurred the line between state and party,

contrary to paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. Allegations of pressure on public-sector employees and voters, as well as numerous allegations of vote buying, persisted.

Contestants, parties, and party leaders actively campaigned on Facebook, with a number of incumbent mayors and government ministers also using their official accounts for campaigning. Several contestants raised concerns regarding manipulative narratives on social networks, and a number of instances of inflammatory rhetoric were noted.

Campaign finance reporting requirements remained limited for the second round, undermining transparency. None of the institutions tasked with campaign finance oversight initiated proceedings against contestants who failed to comply with reporting requirements before the first round, further weakening public trust in and reducing accountability of the electoral process, contrary to international good practice.

The deficient allocation formula for political advertising in the media, which disadvantages independent candidates and non-parliamentary parties and effectively excludes smaller parties with a parliamentary group, significantly distorted the playing field in second-round contests involving such candidates, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice. ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) media monitoring found that the tone of coverage in the news programmes of all monitored broadcasters was generally neutral. Independent candidates were covered primarily through the news.

The SEC reviewed 51 complaints regarding first-round election day procedures in a public session and dismissed or rejected all of them. Not all complaints were reviewed individually, as some were decided jointly on the grounds of similar subject matter. This, combined with the SEC's overly formalistic approach, limited the investigation of certain cases and undermined the right to an effective remedy and raised concerns about due process, contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards and good practice. Fourteen SEC decisions were appealed to the Administrative Court, which granted appeals and overturned the SEC decisions in four cases and rejected the remaining ten cases, upholding the SEC's decisions.

In the limited number of polling stations observed by the ODIHR EOM, the election process was assessed as well-organized, professional, and calm. Established procedures were generally adhered to during voting, and ODIHR EOM observers reported no incidents or serious procedural shortcomings from the observed polling stations, although numerous instances of tracking of voters were noted. Where observed, the vote count and tabulation were assessed as transparent, professional, and efficient and were generally conducted in line with prescribed procedures.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Announcement of First-Round Election Results and Post-Election Developments

The State Election Commission (SEC) announced the preliminary results of the 19 October local elections on 20 October, some 14 hours after the legal deadline of 12 hours from the close of voting.¹ Forty-four mayors were elected in the first round, including 33 nominated by the coalition led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonia National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), 5 from the ethnic Albanian VLEN coalition, and 3 each from the coalitions led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). Only one of the 32 women candidates for mayor was elected in the first round. In four

¹ The SEC informed the ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) that it was technically impossible to meet this deadline.

municipalities, the mayoral elections were invalid because fewer than one-third of registered voters participated.²

In the municipal council elections, the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition won 549 of the 1,307 municipal council seats, showing an overall increase in seats, while the SDSM-led coalition obtained 230, marking a notable decrease. The DUI-led coalition secured 169, the VLEN coalition 128, Levica 66, For Our Macedonia (ZNAM) 44, and the Democratic Party of Turks 21, while smaller parties won a total of 47 seats. In addition, 53 independent candidates were elected. The SEC announced that 53,713 ballots (about 6 per cent of all votes cast) had been declared invalid.³

On 23 October, the SEC announced the final results for elections in which no complaints had been filed, including the council elections in 64 municipalities and the mayoral elections in 33 municipalities where a mayor was elected in the first round. On 28 October, after all available legal remedies related to the first round were exhausted (see *Election Dispute Resolution*), the SEC announced the final results for the remaining municipalities.⁴ Second rounds were scheduled in 32 municipalities and the City of Skopje. There is no turnout requirement for the second round of mayoral elections, and the candidate who obtains the most votes is declared elected. Candidates from the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition participated in 26 second-round mayoral contests, those from the SDSM-led coalition in 17, the DUI-led coalition and VLEN in 5 each, ZNAM in 2, the Experience for Success coalition in 1, while 8 independent candidates also advanced. Levica had one mayoral candidate for the City of Skopje. Of the parties representing smaller ethnic communities that ran independently in the first round, only the Union of Roma had a candidate in the second round, in Shuto Orizari. Only 3 of the second-round candidates were women.

The post-election day environment remained calm. Following the announcement of preliminary results, VMRO-DPMNE representatives called for the resignation of SDSM President Venko Filipche, while VLEN urged DUI leader Ali Ahmeti to step down. The DUI-led coalition reiterated its demand for early parliamentary elections.

Legal Framework

The Electoral Code regulates only certain aspects of the second-round election process, mainly those related to the campaign and campaign finance.⁵ However, several key areas remain unregulated, ambiguous, or insufficiently detailed, including the absence of provisions defining the official start of the second-round campaign, which impacts campaign finance reporting requirements and campaign coverage and advertising in the media. Additionally, there was a lack of a timeline and clear rules for technical preparations for voting, the composition and functioning of the election administration, and the use of billboards during the second-round campaign, as well as procedures for accrediting observers and candidates' authorized representatives between the two rounds.

² Centar Zhupa (21.49 per cent), Vrapchishte (25.18 per cent), Mavrovo i Rostushe (30.31 per cent), and Gostivar (33.31 per cent). The mayoral elections in these municipalities will have to be repeated within 60 days from the publication of the final results.

³ Article 110 of the Electoral Code stipulates that the voter shall circle the ordinal number of the candidate or list they wish to vote for. Article 115.2 defines valid ballots rather broadly as those where the will of the voter can be established in a reliable and unambiguous manner. The relevant SEC instruction, in force since 2011, defines valid ballots only as those where contestants (their ordinal number on the ballot, logo, name, or all of these) have been circled with a blue-ink pen.

⁴ Article 135(2) of the Electoral Code stipulates that the SEC shall announce the final election results immediately, and no later than within 24 hours from when they become final.

⁵ These include provisions related to campaign silence, deadlines for opinion poll publication, rules for media coverage, allocation of funds for paid political advertising and of free airtime, expenditure limits for contestants' campaigns, additional campaign finance reporting requirements, as well as the electoral system for the second round.

Election Administration

Second-round mayoral contests were administered by the SEC, 32 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and the Election Commission of the City of Skopje (ECCS), and 1,777 Election Boards (EBs), with minimal changes in composition of MECs and EBs between the two rounds. Following the first round, the SEC compiled a list of the most frequently asked questions from MECs and EBs, together with the corresponding answers, and distributed it among election officials as supplementary training material.⁶ SEC voter education and information continued between the rounds.

The election administration continued to manage the electoral preparations efficiently and transparently, and overall enjoyed stakeholder trust. However, on 25 October, the Shuto Orizari MEC members stated in an open letter that they had received death threats from the incumbent mayor and his spouse, who alleged electoral fraud and had lodged several complaints in this regard, and announced they would boycott the second round unless their safety was guaranteed (see *Election Dispute Resolution*). Following relevant court rulings, on 28 October, the SEC decided to repeat the Shuto Orizari council elections in three polling stations on 2 November, with two new EBs delegated from the neighbouring MECs, where elections were finalized in the first round.⁷ The SEC also dismissed the original two EBs and stated that they would send requests to the Prosecutor's Office to investigate these cases. The SEC-approved election calendar stipulates that deadlines for second-round election preparations mirror those of the first round, without providing additional details. Between the two rounds, the SEC held four sessions, which were open to media and observers and streamed online.⁸

The law does not provide for voter list updates between the rounds, except with submitted additional requests for homebound voting, and decisions on voters whose complaints on violation of voting rights were accepted by the SEC. According to the SEC, the voter lists for the second round included a total of 1,013,357 voters, including 4,826 voters registered for homebound voting, 1,256 voters in penitentiary institutions, and 214 voters accommodated in social care institutions.

Neither the Electoral Code nor the SEC instruction on the observation of elections contains provisions specific to a second round, or defines the status of authorized representatives of candidates who did not qualify for it. However, the SEC informed the ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) that observer accreditations issued for the first round remained valid and that additional observers could be accredited. The SEC registered a total of 152 citizen observers between the rounds.

Campaign Environment and Campaign Finance

As in the first round, the fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression were respected, and contestants were able to campaign freely. The SEC informed the ODIHR EOM that contestants could resume campaigning as soon as the campaign silence ended when polling stations closed on 19 October. Due to the deficient allocation formula for political advertising, as in the first round, no billboard space was allocated to Levica and ZNAM.⁹ In the absence of specific regulations, most outdoor political advertisement from the first-round campaign remained visible throughout the second round. The second-round campaign concluded on 31 October.

⁶ The ODIHR EOM observed refresher training sessions for EB chairpersons and substitutes in most municipalities where the second round of mayoral elections were held.

⁷ According to the SEC, the legal basis for this decision is Article 31.1 and 31.2 of the Electoral Code, which define general competences of the MECs.

⁸ The sessions of the SEC around the first-round election day were interpreted into Macedonian Sign Language, representing a positive and inclusive step towards ensuring accessibility for persons with hearing impairments.

⁹ ZNAM informed the ODIHR EOM that similarly to the first round, they purchased billboards not claimed by other parties in the Centar municipality of Skopje and Kumanovo municipality, where their candidates contested the second round.

Overall, the campaign was competitive, and voters had a genuine choice between political alternatives. Some mayoral candidates resumed campaigning immediately after the announcement of preliminary results, while most restarted low-key activities a few days later, focusing on small-scale meetings and social network outreach.¹⁰ On 23 and 24 October, respectively, the independent mayoral candidates in Makedonski Brod and Mogila announced their withdrawal, effectively leaving the other candidates there as sole contenders.¹¹ The ethnic Albanian DUI-led coalition and VLEN conducted joint campaign activities for the municipality of Brvenica, emphasizing the importance of ethnicity in political representation.¹² However, after public criticism by the prime minister, VLEN distanced itself from the candidate.¹³ Most contestants' messages focused on municipality-level issues, while party leaders on the national level also emphasized their gains in the first round. The tone of the campaign was more restrained than in the first round, with some instances of personal attacks between candidates, as well as party leaders.¹⁴

Allegations of pressure on public-sector employees and voters persisted.¹⁵ Additionally, the ODIHR EOM received several allegations of vote-buying.¹⁶ Public officeholders, including high-level government officials, supported candidates of their parties and engaged voters in rallies.¹⁷ A number of candidates and ministers continued inaugurations and visits to new infrastructure sites.¹⁸ Some incumbent mayors supported candidates in other municipalities, temporarily providing public services

¹⁰ Between the two rounds, the ODIHR EOM observed three campaign events in three different municipalities, with no women speakers. All three events featured high-level government officials as speakers. The VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition was the only contestant to hold a large rally during the second round, which took place in Skopje on 30 October.

¹¹ However, this move had no formal consequences, and the candidates remained on the ballot, since the law allows for withdrawals only within 48 hours from the adoption of the final list of candidates before the first round.

¹² On 24 October at a campaign event in Hamburg, Germany, Haqim Ramadani, VLEN candidate for Brvenica stated "Kichevo and all other municipalities where there is an Albanian majority will always be run only by Albanians ... everyone should know who is the master in their own land".

¹³ Mr. Ramadani in turn called on officials from the DUI-led coalition and VLEN not to attend his rally.

¹⁴ For example, on October 28, the mayor and Experience for Success candidate in Karposh Stevcho Jakimoski called his opponent to a debate, saying, "If you're afraid this time too, call your foster parent Mickoski". On 28 October, Levica candidate for mayor of Skopje stated in a debate with the VMRO-DPMNE candidate; "You talk about illegal constructions, yet you take photos with the king of illegal constructions — Izet Mexhiti!". On 30 October, VMRO-DPMNE issued a statement, referring to the leader of Levica and their candidate for Skopje as the "leftists from AliExpress". On 28 October, DUI posted on Facebook in reference to VLEN: "Albanians will speak clearly and with dignity; they will say NO to VMRO's vassals".

¹⁵ Allegations regarding pressure on public sector employees were made to the ODIHR EOM in Chucher Sandevo, Krushevo, and Kumanovo. Allegations of pressure on voters were made in the Centar municipality of Skopje, Kumanovo, Probishtip, and Tetovo.

¹⁶ Vote buying allegations were reported from the Centar and Karposh municipalities of Skopje, Kumanovo, and Tetovo. The VMRO-DPMNE candidate in Karposh campaigned on agreements with the private Sistina Hospital to provide discounts for medical examinations for pensioners and with the Zhan Mitrev Clinic to offer free cancer screening services.

¹⁷ Including the prime minister and the ministers of defense, environment, foreign affairs, interior, local government, and transport.

¹⁸ For example, on 22 October, the mayor and SDSM candidate in the Centar Municipality of Skopje inspected the reconstruction of a sports complex. On 26 October, the Struga independent candidate visited the Struga Health Center and General Hospital together with the minister of health, posting on Facebook: "We agreed that through sincere cooperation between the local and central government, with fairness and a strong will to work, we will build a more dignified healthcare service for Struga". On 28 October, the acting mayor and VMRO-DPMNE candidate for Aerodrom, together with the minister of sports, announced the construction of a new sports hall worth EUR 1 million. On 30 October, the deputy prime minister and minister of transport, at a rally with the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for Brvenica, stated, "the mayor will get a second term here. ... We have reserved additional funds in the Ministry of Transport, and I announce that for ... Brvenica there will be a special budget which will be additional to everything we already have".

there.¹⁹ These practices reinforced the incumbents' advantage and blurred the line between state and party, contrary to paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.²⁰ Since the announcement of the elections, the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) received some 36 reports, most alleging misuse of state resources and attempts to pressure voters. As before the first round, the SCPC did not treat these reports as complaints and therefore did not review them before the second-round election day.²¹

Contestants actively campaigned on Facebook, sharing content highlighting past achievements, publicizing campaign events, and promising local developments.²² Official party accounts continued promoting mayoral candidates, while a number of incumbent mayors and ministers used their official Facebook accounts for campaign purposes. Of the nine signatories of the Code of Conduct in the Online Sphere during Electoral Processes and Referenda, Levica did not adhere to the Code's standards on language and rhetoric.²³ Several contestants raised concerns regarding online harassment, as well as aggressive and manipulative narratives on social networks.²⁴ The ODIHR EOM noted several instances of inflammatory rhetoric, including a newly elected councilor's hateful and derogatory post against the Roma community, which was condemned by several civil society organizations and politicians.²⁵ In the final stages of the campaign, a number of anonymous accounts and some journalists disseminated sensitive personal data of the Levica candidate for the City of Skopje on social networks, raising concerns about privacy and personal data protection.²⁶

Campaign finance reporting requirements for the second round remained limited. While contestants must submit an additional interim report one day before the second-round election day, only donations must be reported.²⁷ Combined with a reporting template that does not provide a breakdown of donations and expenditures by municipality, this further undermined transparency, contrary to international good

¹⁹ For example, the incumbent mayor of Kumanovo and leader of ZNAM, Maksim Dimitrievski, sent garbage collection trucks to the Centar municipality of Skopje, which the ZNAM candidate used in his campaign; the mayors of Ilinden, Sopishte, and Zelenikovo provided garbage collection services in the municipality of Aerodrom, which then featured in the VMRO-DPMNE candidate's campaign.

²⁰ Paragraph 5.4 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) calls for "a clear separation between the State and political parties".

²¹ By law, the SCPC should review and decide on complaints related to violations of campaign-finance rules and misuse of administrative resources within five days.

²² In the second round, the ODIHR EOM followed the campaign activities of 30 Facebook accounts of political parties, coalitions, candidates, and party leaders.

²³ [The Code](#) calls on contestants to "use... an exemplary and polite language in their public communication, and show respect for the diverse attitudes and opinions" and to "refrain from and strongly condemn the use of speech that incites... discrimination on any grounds".

²⁴ Such concerns were raised in Karposh, Kumanovo, and Studenichani. In addition, on 31 October, the independent candidate in Struga at a press conference [stated](#) that his supporters and journalists had been attacked on social networks. On the same day, the Association of Online Journalists issued a [statement](#) condemning any pressure, attacks and hate speech against journalists, and calling on public officials and political actors to refrain from threats, insults, and the dissemination of false information.

²⁵ On 20 October, the newly elected Negotino councilor from the Macedonian Action – Conservative Party (MAAK) published a [Facebook post](#) using a racial slur against the Roma community and suggesting that members of the community should be deprived of the right to vote. On 22 October, the leader of Levica [posted](#) on Facebook: "Just tell this VMRO-ridden monstrosity to go to hell, and that's it. Do not argue with these [mental] patients, please, I beg you." On 24 October, DUI [posted](#) on Facebook in reference to VLEN celebrating its victory "Come on, let's immediately go to early parliamentary elections! VLEN suffers from the Gazimestan syndrome!" On 27 October, Levica [posted in](#) reference to Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski "Is this what doctors call a psycho?"

²⁶ Personal data protection is governed by the 2020 Law on Personal Data Protection. The Personal Data Protection Agency has also issued guidelines on the processing of personal data and on reporting personal data breaches.

²⁷ 28 of these reports were posted on the second-round election day by SCPC.

practice.²⁸ The Electoral Code provides for fines of up to EUR 9,000, in Macedonian Denar (MKD) equivalent, for breaches of campaign finance regulations, including exceeding donation or spending limits or failing to submit financial reports.²⁹ Despite the existence of two oversight bodies, the SCPC and the State Audit Office (SAO), and the high number of contestants who did not comply with reporting requirements, no proceedings were initiated regarding infringements of either the first or second interim reports, due to the absence of a legal provision specifying institutional responsibility for initiating such action. This gap effectively neutralized the sanctioning mechanism, further weakening public trust in the oversight institutions and reducing accountability of the electoral process, contrary to international good practice.³⁰

Media

As in the first round, the media were obliged to cover the elections in a balanced and unbiased manner. State funds for political advertising and airtime allocation were distributed among contestants according to the same formula applied to the first round, disadvantaging independent candidates and non-parliamentary parties and effectively excluding smaller parties with a parliamentary group.³¹ In the context of mayoral run-offs, this significantly distorted the playing field in contests with independent candidates or those representing smaller parties, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice.³² The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAAVMS) resumed its media monitoring and daily reporting to the SEC on 20 October.³³

ODIHR EOM media monitoring found that the tone of coverage in the news programmes of all monitored broadcasters was generally neutral. With fewer candidates in the second round, the monitored broadcasters provided voters with ample information about contestants, including independent candidates and those of smaller political parties. While paid political advertising was skewed in favour

²⁸ Paragraph 261 of the [2020 ODIHR Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “[i]t 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”.

²⁹ EUR 1 equals approximately MKD 61.5. The second interim reports of the 167 contestants were due on 18 October, one day before the first-round election day. According to the SEC and SCPC, only 57 reports were submitted on time, with 2 more submitted 2 days later, and 6 submitted 3 days after the deadline. As with the first interim reports, the content and timing of publication varied. The SCPC published reports on the day after submission, coinciding with election day, while the SEC and SAO did so three days later. The last interim report is due one day after the closure of the campaign bank account and covers the period between the end of the campaign and the account’s closure.

³⁰ Paragraph 276 of the [2020 ODIHR Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “In cases where there are several monitoring bodies, the relevant legislation should clearly outline their various differing competences and mandates and ensure that they complement”.

³¹ In the City of Skopje and the Centar municipality of Skopje, VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, each having access to 45 per cent of the budget allocated for the campaign in the media, contested the second round against Levica and ZNAM candidates, who were not entitled to any funds. In 8 other municipalities, independent candidates and 1 candidate from a non-parliamentary party, entitled to 3 per cent of funds, competed against candidates of major parties with 45 per cent of funds allocated to them.

³² 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 Council of Europe’s European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) 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 ODIHR and Venice Commission [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”.

³³ On 19 and 20 October, the AAAVMS initiated four misdemeanor procedures against four television (TV) stations (two cable TV and two local TV stations) for violating the campaign silence in the first round.

of larger parties, independent candidates were covered mostly in the news.³⁴ As in the first round, online media reflected political polarization.³⁵

Election Dispute Resolution

Within the prescribed deadline, 51 complaints were filed with the SEC regarding first-round election day procedures, including 19 concerning the voting process and 32 related to results determination and tabulation. The SEC reviewed all complaints in a public session on 23 October, dismissing 8 as inadmissible or submitted outside prescribed procedures and rejecting the remaining 43 as unfounded.³⁶ In several cases, the SEC departed from the rule of reviewing complaints in order of submission, instead grouping those concerning the same municipalities or complainants.³⁷ In line with procedures, representatives of all complainants were invited to the session, and those present were heard before decisions were adopted. Not all complaints were reviewed individually, as some were decided jointly on the grounds of similar subject matter, with, at times, an overly formalistic approach of the SEC.³⁸ Additionally, the SEC, in its decisions, provided plaintiffs with incorrect notice about available legal remedies.³⁹ These shortcomings, together with restrictive deadlines, limited the investigation of certain cases. Inconsistent application of the law and SEC instructions further undermined the right to effective remedy and raised concerns about due process, contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards and good practice.⁴⁰

Between the two rounds, the SEC also received 30 complaints related to voter registration and homebound voting, accepting 22 and rejecting 8.

Fourteen SEC decisions were appealed to the Administrative Court, which upheld the SEC decision in 10 cases. After examining the election materials in one case, and conducting a recount of ballots in three more cases, in accordance with procedures, and in a thorough and effective manner in public sessions, the Court granted the appeals in four cases.⁴¹ The Court overturned the SEC's decisions in these cases and annulled results in three polling stations in Shuto Orizari, one related to the mayoral election and

³⁴ *Kanal 5* and *Telma* televised debates for the municipality of Kumanovo. In prime time, *MRT 1* televised debates for Probishtip and Valandovo, while no candidates expressed interest in debates on *MRT 2*. *TV Alfa* broadcast debates for the Centar municipality of Skopje and for Valandovo, *Kanal 5* also televised debates for Aerodrom and the City of Skopje, and *Telma* – for Aerodrom, Karpos, Probishtip, and Valandovo, while debates for the City of Skopje were planned but the VMRO-DPMNE candidate declined to participate.

³⁵ With the exception of *Sloboden Pечат*, which in both rounds reported exclusively in a neutral tone.

³⁶ Three complaints were related to the Gostivar mayoral election, and were dismissed by the SEC on the grounds that the election there would be repeated, even though no formal decision on repeating the election had been announced at the time of the SEC review. Five other complaints were dismissed because they had been submitted electronically.

³⁷ The [SEC Instruction on the Manner and Procedure for Resolving the Complaints Within the Authority of SEC](#) prescribes that complaints should be processed in order of submission.

³⁸ For instance, not accepting complaints because they were submitted electronically, or not reviewing complaints in detail because there was no remark in the protocol from the polling station in question, or reviewing complaints filed by the same contestant together rather than in the order in which they were submitted.

³⁹ In its decisions, the SEC notifies plaintiffs that appeals against its decisions can be filed with the Administrative Court via the SEC, while the Electoral Code prescribes only that appeals against SEC decisions can be filed with the Administrative Court, without specifying that this should be done via an intermediary body.

⁴⁰ 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.” Paragraph 13.9 of the [1986 OSCE Vienna Document](#) tasks OSCE participating States to effectively apply legal remedies, including “the right to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time before an independent and impartial tribunal, including the right to present legal arguments”. Section II.3.3b of the Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recommends that “the procedure must be simple and devoid from formalism, in particular concerning the admissibility of appeals”.

⁴¹ The recounts revealed several serious irregularities in EB protocols and omissions in election materials. These included a missing page in one EB protocol, discrepancies between the figures recorded in all the EB results protocols and the results of the recounts, missing safety seals on one ballot box, and incorrectly packed election materials.

three for the municipal council elections. The Court ruled in panels of five judges, as prescribed by law, allowed parties in the process to be heard, and published its rulings promptly, despite the short deadlines.⁴²

Election Day

In line with ODIHR methodology and in the absence of short-term observers in the second round, the ODIHR EOM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner, but mission members visited a limited number of polling stations and MECs in 18 municipalities.

In the polling stations where opening was observed, procedures were followed. Voting, as observed throughout the day, was assessed as well-organized, professional, and calm. In the limited number of polling stations observed, established procedures were generally adhered to, and ODIHR EOM observers reported no incidents or serious procedural shortcomings. Some technical problems with biometric voter identification were again noted. Authorized candidate representatives were present in almost all polling stations observed, and the ODIHR EOM did not observe any interference in the work of EBs. However, it observed numerous instances where individuals other than EB members kept track of voters who had voted, indicating possible pressure on voters and attempts to unduly influence their choice.

The vote counts observed by the ODIHR EOM were assessed as transparent and efficient and were generally conducted in line with prescribed procedures, with some exceptions where required reconciliation steps were omitted or not performed in the correct order. No disagreements over ballot validity were noted, and the EBs observed had no difficulties completing the results protocol. Where observed, tabulation was well-organized, professional and transparent, with efficient intake of election materials and verification of protocols, and was conducted in line with established procedures.

The SEC announced a turnout of 41.76 per cent. It started posting partial preliminary election results on its website, down to polling station level, at around 19:45 on 2 November, and announced preliminary results at 21:50, contributing to transparency.

Campaign silence regulations were generally respected, but some violations were reported. Notably, VMRO-DPMNE leader and Prime Minister Mickoski, in a media statement, promoted his party and its candidates. The SEC withdrew the accreditations of eight observers from the organization Wake Up for campaigning in front of a polling station in Shuto Orizari and informed the Prosecutor's Office about the incident.

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

⁴² By law, the Administrative Court must announce its rulings within two hours of the conclusion of a hearing. In one case, the Court was two hours late due to technical omissions by the SEC, which had delivered incorrect election materials to the Court and did not provide enough safety seals, causing a delay in the process, and, consequently, in the announcement of the ruling. The Court publicly criticized the SEC representatives for a lack of professionalism, claiming that similar omissions of the SEC have recurred in successive electoral cycles.

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Skopje, 3 November 2025 – The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. This assessment should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions published on 20 October following the first-round election day.

ODIHR has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the process, including the tabulation and announcement of results and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some months after the completion of the electoral process.

Matteo Mecacci is the Head of the ODIHR EOM, deployed from 5 September. The ODIHR EOM observation of the second round included 11 core team experts and 2 ODIHR officials in Skopje, and 10 long-term observers. ODIHR observers for the second round came from 17 countries. Nine of the 23 ODIHR observers were women.

The IEOM wishes to thank the authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia for the invitation to observe the elections, and the State Election Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade for their assistance. The IEOM wishes to also express its appreciation to other state institutions, political parties, candidates, media, civil society organizations, and international community representatives for their co-operation.

For further information, please contact:

- Matteo Mecacci, Head of the ODIHR EOM, in Skopje (+389 71 393185);
- Katya Andrusz, ODIHR Spokesperson (+48 609 522266), or
- Ranko Vukčević, ODIHR Election Adviser (+48 723 960008).

ODIHR EOM Address:

Georgi Dimitrov 16
1000 Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia
telephone: +389 71 393185; email: office@odihr.mk