



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
24 April 2016

OSCE/ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

2-5 November 2015



Warsaw
27 November 2015

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OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report

I. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to observe the 24 April 2016 early parliamentary elections and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 2 to 5 November. The NAM included Richard Lappin, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Election Adviser, Tamara Otiashvili, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser, and Francesco Pagani, Senior Policy Analyst with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

The purpose of the mission was to assess the pre-election environment and the preparations for the elections. Based on this assessment, the NAM should recommend whether to deploy an OSCE/ODIHR election-related activity for the forthcoming elections, and if so, what type of activity best meets the identified needs. Meetings were held with officials from state institutions and the election administration, as well as with representatives of political parties, media, civil society, and the resident international community. A list of meetings is annexed to this report.

The OSCE/ODIHR would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OSCE Mission to Skopje for their assistance and co-operation in organizing the NAM. The OSCE/ODIHR would also like to thank all of its interlocutors for taking the time to meet with the NAM.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a parliamentary republic, with legislative powers vested in the unicameral parliament elected for a four-year term. The elections on 24 April 2016 will take place as part of a multi-party agreement designed to end political tensions stemming from the oppositions' boycott of parliament and the release of wiretapped recordings on alleged abuse of power by senior government and public officials.

Elections are primarily regulated by the Constitution and the Electoral Code. In line with the multi-party agreement, substantial amendments were introduced to the Electoral Code that address the greater part of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and enjoy cross-party support. However, several interlocutors expressed concerns about the lack of meaningful consultation in the process and that the short timeframe before elections may negatively affect election stakeholders' understanding of new provisions and their ability to fulfil their roles in an effective manner.

Key legal changes include new provisions related to the electoral system for out-of-country voting, the format and competences of the State Election Commission (SEC), media coverage, campaign finance regulations, electoral dispute resolution, and safeguards to protect against pressure on voters and the abuse of state resources. Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors recognised the need for continued electoral reform and the consideration of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations after these elections.

Between 120 and 123 members of parliament (MPs) will be elected under a proportional representation system, using closed lists. Twenty MPs will be elected from each of six in-country electoral districts and up to three MPs will be elected from a single out-of-country district.

These elections will be organized by a three-level election administration, headed by the SEC. Recent amendments changed the SEC's composition and increased its competences to include primary maintenance of the voter lists and to establish an electronic system for complaints' management. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally expressed confidence in the new SEC format and its anticipated capacity to administer elections in an impartial manner. However, some concerns were raised that the late appointment of SEC members may hinder electoral preparations. In addition, some party representatives questioned the professionalism of lower-level commissions and raised concerns of possible manipulations on election day, particularly during the count.

All citizens over the age of 18 years are eligible to vote, unless disenfranchised by a final court decision for reasons of legal incapacity or as part of a criminal conviction. Voter registration is passive, with the exception of voters residing abroad who are required to actively register. The SEC should adopt a methodology on how to update the voter lists based on the cross-checking of databases and field visits. A number of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns on the limited time available for such an exercise. Voter photographs on voter lists and the marking of voters' thumbs with ink have been introduced as possible safeguards against multiple voting.

Candidates can be nominated by political parties, coalitions of parties, or by groups of voters. Candidate registration procedures are clearly defined and generally inclusive. In line with a prior OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, a voter can now sign in support of more than one prospective contestant. As a measure to encourage women's participation, every candidate list is now required to have at least 40 per cent of candidates reserved for the less-represented gender.

The election campaign officially starts 20 days before election day. The amended law provides for more equitable conditions for outdoor advertising by dividing the space between ruling, opposition and non-parliamentary parties. In addition, with the aim of preventing the abuse of state resources, the law imposes a ban of political advertising starting from 20 December until the start of the campaign. Although no OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors raised concerns about the ability of parties and candidates to campaign freely, some feared biased media coverage of the campaign, an increase in nationalist rhetoric, pressure on voters, and the potential abuse of state resources.

The amended legal framework establishes greater regulation of campaign finance. This includes lower donation and campaign expenditure limits, itemized campaign finance reports, rules on third party donations, and enhanced investigative powers for the State Audit Office.

The large number of media outlets in the country is largely divided along ethnic and political lines. Many OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns about the lack of balance in media reporting, including by the public broadcaster, as well as arrests, physical attacks and other forms of intimidation against journalists. Recent amendments introduced provisions for equal and balanced media access for all electoral contestants. The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS) monitors broadcast media during the campaign. However, several interlocutors expressed concerns about the independence of the AVMS and its ability to provide impartial oversight.

All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed support for a large-scale OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission as a means to promote confidence in the electoral process. Several asked for the earliest and largest possible OSCE/ODIHR deployment, given the tense and fragile political

atmosphere, and recommended an extended duration of the long term observation. Although the greater part of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have been addressed in the law, there are a number of issues that would benefit from continued attention. These include implementation of the introduced legal amendments, the work of the election administration, procedures for updating voter lists, the election campaign and potential pressure on voters and abuse of state resources, media coverage of elections, adherence to campaign finance rules, the effectiveness of complaints and appeals mechanisms, and the administration of election day procedures, including the vote count. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors underscored the value of an OSCE/ODIHR observation mission and welcomed any recommendations that the mission may make for potential improvement of the process.

Based on the findings of this report, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM recommends an extended deployment of an election observation mission for the 24 April 2016 early parliamentary elections. In addition to a core team of analysts, the OSCE/ODIHR will request the secondment by OSCE participating States of 24 long-term observers to follow the electoral process countrywide, as well as 300 short-term observers to follow election day procedures.

III. FINDINGS

A. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a parliamentary republic, with legislative powers vested in the unicameral parliament elected for a four-year term. Executive powers are exercised by the government, led by the prime minister. The upcoming elections will be the third consecutive early parliamentary elections held in the country.

The last parliamentary elections were held on 27 April 2014 and resulted in a government led by a coalition of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) with 61 seats and the ethnic-Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) with 19 seats. The opposition is led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) with 34 seats, the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) with 7 seats, and the National Democratic Revival (NDR) and Citizens Option for Macedonia (GROM) each with 1 seat. The leader of VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, was subsequently elected prime minister by the parliament. Women hold some 34 per cent of seats in the outgoing parliament.

Following the elections, SDSM, DPA and NDR did not to accept their mandates and boycotted parliament.¹ The political crisis deepened in February 2015 with the release of allegedly incriminating wiretapped recordings on corruption and abuse of power by senior government and public officials. A series of large-scale protests followed and dialogue between governing and opposition parties effectively ceased. The political landscape was further affected by a security incident in the town of Kumanovo on 9-10 May, where a police operation against an armed group led to a high number of casualties. As a result, the Minister of Internal Affairs and two high-ranking security officials resigned.

In April, the European Union (EU) started facilitating dialogue between the leaders of VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA, which resulted in the so-called Przino Agreement on 2 June and a subsequent Protocol on 15 July.² The agreement included provisions to hold early parliamentary

¹ DPA returned to parliament on 18 October 2014.

² See the [Przino Agreement](#) and [Protocol](#).

elections on 24 April, for SDSM to return to parliament, to appoint a new government in the run-up to elections, to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate issues arising from the wiretapped recordings, to restructure the State Election Commission (SEC), and to appoint new Ministers of Internal Affairs and of Labour and Social Affairs as well as a number of Deputy Ministers.

While SDSM returned to parliament on 1 September, disagreement persisted on other issues, including on the appointment of the special prosecutor's team, as well as on draft laws related to the handling of wiretapped recordings. On 6 November, the parties agreed on the pending issues and re-endorsed the Przino Agreement. A remaining step in the implementation of the agreement is the resignation of the prime minister in due time to have the new government sworn in on 15 January.

Many OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors characterized the political environment as tense and fragile, largely due to long-standing conflicts between governing and opposition parties and declining trust in state institutions, and expressed concern that this could negatively impact the conduct of elections. The upcoming elections are also widely viewed by interlocutors as an important test for the country in light of its aspirations towards EU and NATO membership.

The last year also saw the emergence of three new ethnic-Albanian parties: BESA Movement, Democratic Party of Albanians – Reform Movement, and Unity Party. The latter two were established by former members, respectively, of the DPA and the DUI.

The OSCE/ODIHR has previously observed 15 elections in the country.³ The most recent OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission deployed for the 2014 presidential and early parliamentary elections concluded that the elections “were efficiently administered, including on election day. Candidates were able to campaign without obstruction and freedoms of assembly and association were respected. However, elements of the campaign indicated an inadequate separation between party and state activities, which is at odds with paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and other international obligations for democratic elections”. The report included several recommendations for the authorities on how electoral processes may be improved and brought more closely in line with OSCE commitments.⁴

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the Constitution and the Electoral Code. Following the Przino Agreement a working group was created with the participation of VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA, with the aim to propose amendments to the Electoral Code that would address prior OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. The working group reached consensus on electoral reform on 6 November. On 9 November, the proposal was submitted to the parliament and was adopted on the same day in an immediate vote procedure.

Key changes to the Electoral Code include new provisions related to the electoral system for out-of-country voting, the format and competences for the SEC, media coverage, campaign finance regulations, electoral dispute resolution, and safeguards to protect against pressure on voters and the abuse of state resources. The amendments enjoyed cross-party support and address the greater part of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. However, a number of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors, including relevant state agencies and civil society, voiced disappointment about a lack

³ See [previous OSCE/ODIHR reports](#) on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

⁴ In paragraph 25 of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Document, OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”.

of meaningful consultation and transparency in the process.⁵ The SEC and several other interlocutors added that late changes to fundamental aspects of the law may negatively affect electoral stakeholders' understanding of new provisions and their ability to fulfil their roles in an effective and timely manner.⁶

Some prior recommendations remain unaddressed, including in respect of voter registration and media. Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors recognized the need for continued electoral reform and consideration of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations after these elections.⁷

In line with previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, recent amendments introduced shorter deadlines for electoral dispute resolution and additional transparency measures for more effective legal redress. All decisions of the adjudicating bodies now have to be published on the respective websites within 24 hours after their adoption. In addition, decisions of the SEC, the State Audit office (SAO) and the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) can now be appealed to the Administrative Court. A number of OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors raised concerns with respect to the independence of the judiciary and stressed the need for its future reform.⁸

C. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Between 120 and 123 members of parliament (MPs) will be elected under a proportional representation system, using closed lists. Of these, twenty MPs will be elected from the candidate lists in each of the six in-country electoral districts and up to three MPs will be elected from a single out-of-country district. In-country districts should represent an approximately equal number of registered voters, with the law permitting deviations of up to five per cent from the average number of voters per district.

The recent amendments to the Electoral Code changed the electoral system for out-of-country voting from three separate majoritarian contests to a single proportional contest. It also introduced a quota for election of MPs from the out-of-country district that is based on the minimum number of votes needed for a MP to be elected from an in-country district.⁹ Previously, the OSCE/ODIHR recommended that the allocation of mandates in out-of-country districts should be reviewed to ensure that each MP represents a similar number of registered voters so that the principle of equal suffrage is respected.

⁵ Paragraph 5.8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document provides that legislation should be "adopted at the end of a public procedure".

⁶ Section II.2.b of the 2002 Council of Europe's Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters recommends that "the fundamental elements of electoral law...should not be open to amendment less than one year before an election". However, the follow-up to recommendations is considered as an exception to the principle of the stability of electoral law, which "should not be invoked to maintain a situation contrary to the standards of the European electoral heritage, or to prevent the implementation of recommendations by international organisations". See [Section II.2 of the Venice Commission's interpretative declaration on the stability of the electoral law](#).

⁷ An obligation for future electoral reform, based on OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations, is included as an addendum to the revised Electoral Code.

⁸ See, the United Nations' Human Rights Committee Report from 17 August 2015 on "[Concluding observations on the third periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)".

⁹ In order to be elected, the first candidate must receive the same number of votes as the MP elected with the least number of votes from an in-country district; for the second candidate to be elected twice as many votes should be cast, and the election of the third requires thrice as many votes. If the respective threshold is not obtained, no candidate will be elected.

D. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

These elections will be organized by a three-level election administration, comprising the SEC, 80 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs), and a number of Electoral Boards (EBs), including in diplomatic and consular offices abroad.¹⁰

The SEC has a five-year mandate and is responsible for the overall conduct of the elections. Recent amendments increased its competences to include sole maintenance of the voter lists and to establish an electronic system for complaints' management. The composition of the SEC was also amended and it will now be composed of nine members: three nominated by ruling political parties, three by opposition parties, and three jointly elected by the ruling and opposition parties based on applications from independent experts. The parliament will elect the SEC members with a two-thirds majority, as well as the chairperson and his/her deputy from among the independent members.¹¹

In line with a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, recent amendments foresee the formation of a legal department within the SEC to advise on complaints and appeals, as well as other decisions pertaining to the electoral process. The law also envisages extending and strengthening the SEC's IT infrastructure and personnel. The SEC and some other OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns on the timely employment of support staff due to existing limitations on public recruitment.

Recent amendments also introduced new rules for SEC decision-making processes. Absentee vote is no longer possible and all decisions should be adopted by a majority vote. As an exception, decisions concerning an ethnic community may require a consensus vote should a SEC member from that community request such a process. All SEC sessions should be open to the public.

The composition and mandates of lower-level commissions remains unchanged. MECs are composed of five members (and five deputies), randomly selected from public service employees for five-year terms. MECs are responsible for overseeing the electoral process in each municipality, appointment and training of EBs, tabulation and announcement of municipal results, as well as other technical preparations under the guidance of the SEC. EBs are composed of five members (and five deputies) and formed using a mixed professional-political model with one member nominated by the governing political parties, one by the opposition parties, and three randomly selected from public service employees. EBs are responsible for the conduct of election day procedures at polling stations. EBs that are established abroad are composed of employees of diplomatic and consular offices.

The Electoral Code provides for equitable ethnic and gender representation in election administration bodies. Ethnic communities that constitute more than 20 per cent of the population in a municipality should be represented in MECs and EBs, while at least 30 per cent of members in all election bodies should come from each gender. Voter information materials are provided in minority languages.

OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally expressed confidence in the new SEC format and its anticipated capacity to administer elections in an impartial and effective manner. However, some concerns were raised that electoral preparations may be hindered by the late appointment of SEC

¹⁰ The SEC still has to determine the number and locations of EBs. There were 3,480 EBs for the 2014 elections.

¹¹ For equitable ethnic representation, the law provides for appointment of two ethnic Macedonians and one ethnic Albanian for each of the three categories.

members and support staff. In addition, some party representatives questioned the professionalism of lower-level commissions and raised concerns of possible manipulations on election day, particularly during the vote count.

E. VOTER RIGHTS AND REGISTRATION

All citizens over the age of 18 years are eligible to vote, unless disenfranchised by a final court decision for reasons of legal incapacity or as part of a criminal conviction. Voting rights are limited by residence in the respective electoral district, and a voter is also obliged to have a valid biometric identification card or passport.

Voter registration is passive, with the exception of voters residing abroad who are required to actively register. Following recent changes to the Electoral Code, the SEC has sole responsibility for maintaining the voter lists with a right to access data from all relevant civil and population registers. The SEC is required to adopt written methodologies for the maintenance and updating of voter lists based on statistical analyses, cross-checking of databases, and unlimited field checks. These methodologies should be approved by the four largest parliamentary parties prior to their implementation. The voter lists will be published online and each voter will be entitled to request a correction of personal data, with due adherence to the data protection provisions. While these changes were widely seen as a positive step towards addressing longstanding concerns about the accuracy of the voter lists, a number of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed reservations about the limited time available for such an exercise. The majority of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors also recognised the need for more sustainable reforms to voter registration procedures in the post-electoral period.

For the first time in these elections, voters' photographs will be placed on voter lists. This, combined with the reintroduction of marking a voter's thumb with an invisible ink, was generally welcomed by OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors as providing additional safeguards against multiple voting.

F. CANDIDATE RIGHTS AND REGISTRATION

All citizens with voting rights are eligible to stand as candidates. Those who are serving a prison sentence of at least six months for a criminal offence are not eligible to run. The law also identifies a range of government and government-related positions as being incompatible with candidacy.

Candidates can be nominated by political parties, coalitions of political parties, or by groups of voters. Candidate registration procedures are clearly defined and generally inclusive. Candidate lists submitted by a group of voters are required to provide at least 1,000 supporting signatures of voters residing in the electoral district. The law requires that a voter signs in support of a candidate list in one of the regional SEC offices in front of a SEC representative. The OSCE/ODIHR has previously recommended considering alternative methods for signature collection in order to reduce the potential for intimidation. However, in line with a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, a voter can now sign in support of more than one prospective contestant.

In addition, as a measure to encourage the participation of women, the Electoral Code now requires every candidate list to have at least 40 per cent of candidates, with at least one in each consecutive three places on the list, reserved for the less-represented gender.

G. ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The official election campaign starts 20 days and lasts until 24 hours before election day. The amended law provides for more equitable conditions for outdoor advertising by dividing the space between ruling, opposition and non-parliamentary parties.¹² In addition, with the aim of preventing the abuse of state resources in campaigning, the law imposes a ban on public advertisements from the 9 November until election day and a ban of political advertising, including on Internet portals, from 20 December until the start of the official campaign.

All electoral contestants are now obliged to sign a Code on Fair and Democratic Elections by which they commit to protect citizens from any pressure, or attempt of pressure, particularly those employed in the public administration. The use of state offices, equipment and vehicles in the campaign is expressly forbidden, as are announcements regarding changes to public employment policies. The OSCE/ODIHR has previously recommended that authorities exhibit greater political will to ensure sufficient separation between state and political party activities and take vigorous steps to counter any forms of pressure on voters.

Although no OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors raised concerns about the ability of parties and candidates to campaign freely, including in minority languages, some feared biased media coverage of the campaign, an increase in nationalist rhetoric, pressure on voters, and the potential abuse of state resources and vote buying.

Campaign finance regulations are contained in the Electoral Code and Law on Financing Political Parties, which permits private and public campaign financing. Contestants are reimbursed EUR 0.25 from the state budget for each vote received, provided that they obtain at least 1.5 per cent of the total number of votes cast. Foreign or anonymous donations, as well as those from state-owned, religious and charitable organizations, are prohibited. Recent amendments lowered donation limits both for natural and legal persons: individuals may donate up to EUR 3,000 while legal entities may donate up to EUR 30,000. The campaign expenditure ceiling for each electoral contestant has also decreased to approximately EUR 1.8 per registered voter.

Electoral contestants are required to submit two interim reports and a final report on their campaign expenditures. The supervision of campaign finance is primarily carried out by the SAO, however the SEC and the SCPC also receive and publish the campaign finance reports. In line with previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, itemized reporting on campaign finance income and expenditure is now required, legislation has been extended to include third party donations, and the SAO has been granted more robust investigative powers. The SAO has 60 days to review final reports and can impose a range of sanctions for non-compliance. The OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption have previously recommended that the range of sanctions available for such violations be reviewed so as to ensure that they are effective, proportionate and dissuasive.¹³

H. MEDIA

The large number of media outlets in the country is largely divided along ethnic and political lines. Although the legal framework guarantees freedom of expression and media, many OSCE/ODIHR

¹² According to the Electoral Code, 40 per cent should be available for the ruling parties, 40 per cent for opposition parties, 10 per cent for parliamentary parties without a parliamentary group, and 10 per cent for non-parliamentary parties.

¹³ See, [GRECO's Second Compliance Report](#), 20 May 2014.

NAM interlocutors expressed concern on the lack of balance and impartiality in media reporting, including by the public broadcaster, as well as the selective allocation of public funds to pro-government media outlets. Concerns were also raised about arrests, physical attacks and other forms of pressure on journalists. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) has called on the authorities “to ease the pressure on media and respect free and critical voices”.¹⁴ The RFoM has also stated that “public officials and politicians must have a higher tolerance for critical reporting and have a duty to protect all journalists”.¹⁵

Television is the predominant source of news and information. The public broadcaster, Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT), operates three television channels and three radio stations nationally. MRT is funded through a broadcast tax imposed on households and legal entities, and it is also entitled to seek additional funds from the state budget. In addition, there are 65 private television channels and 75 radio stations that operate at the national and local level. Print media and the Internet are frequently used as a source of political information.

The Electoral Code regulates the conduct of the campaign in the media. All broadcasters are required to cover elections in a fair, balanced, and impartial manner, providing contestants with equitable access. As per the recent amendments, MRT has to adopt Rules for Equitable Political Media Presentation, including rules on allocation of free air time.¹⁶ Strict rules governing news coverage during the campaign are also introduced, allotting 30 per cent of time to national and global events, 30 per cent to the campaign activities of ruling parties, 30 per cent to the campaign activities of opposition parties and the remaining 10 per cent to non-parliamentary parties. For paid political advertisements, the broadcasters may air a total of 18 minutes of advertising per day: 8 minutes for ruling political parties, 8 minutes for opposition parties and a total of 1 minute for each the parties without a parliamentary group and those not represented in the parliament. All media are also obliged to publish the price list for paid advertising, which cannot change during the election campaign. MRT is required to organize debates between the main ruling and opposition parties.

Compliance with media regulations is overseen by the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS). The AVMS is obliged to monitor broadcast media during the campaign period and to react to irregularities. The AVMS’s monitoring methodology and reports should be published on its website. The 2013 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services altered the organizational structure of the AVMS to a two-level decision-making: the Council of Members, consisting of seven members and appointed for a seven-year term and the Agency Director, elected by, and from, the Council of Ministers for the same mandate.¹⁷ While the law provides for a diversified representation through the nominating institutions, several OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns on the independence of the AVMS and its ability to provide impartial and effective oversight.¹⁸ Previously, the OSCE/ODIHR recommended that AVMS members have prior media experience and are not primarily political appointees.

¹⁴ See, [Press Release](#) of the OSCE RFoM from 17 January 2015.

¹⁵ See, [Press Release](#) of the OSCE RFoM from 23 July 2015. See also the United Nations’ Human Rights Committee Report from 17 August 2015 on “[Concluding observations on the third periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)”.

¹⁶ According to the Electoral Code, the free airtime should be provided between 16:00 and 23:00.

¹⁷ The Association of Journalists and the Parliamentary Committee for Elections and Appointments each nominate two members. The Bar Association, Association of Local Self-government Units, and the Interuniversity Conference nominate one each. Currently, one out of seven members is a woman.

¹⁸ See, UN [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#), 1 April 2014.

I. ELECTION OBSERVATION

The Electoral Code provides for international and citizen election observation. Political parties contesting the elections are also entitled to delegate observers to each election commission. Observers have a right to observe all aspects of the electoral process, as well as receive copies of results protocols. Guidelines detailing observer rights and responsibilities, as well as the procedures for accreditation, should be developed by the SEC. A number of citizen observer groups expressed their intention to comprehensively observe the elections, with other groups focussing on specific issues such as media monitoring, voter intimidation, or the potential abuse of state resources.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed support for a large-scale OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission as a means to promote confidence in the electoral process. Several asked for the earliest and largest possible OSCE/ODIHR deployment, given the tense and fragile political atmosphere, and recommended an extended duration of the long term observation. Although the greater part of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have been addressed in the law, there are a number of issues that would benefit from continued attention. These include implementation of the introduced legal amendments, the work of the election administration, procedures for updating voter lists, the election campaign and potential pressure on voters and abuse of state resources, media coverage of elections, adherence to campaign finance rules, the effectiveness of complaints and appeals mechanisms, and the administration of election day procedures, including the vote count. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors underscored the value of an OSCE/ODIHR observation mission and welcomed any recommendations that the mission may make for potential improvement of the process.

Based on the findings of this report, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM recommends an extended deployment of an election observation mission for the 24 April 2016 early parliamentary elections. In addition to a core team of analysts, the OSCE/ODIHR will request the secondment by OSCE participating States of 24 long-term observers to follow the electoral process countrywide, as well as 300 short-term observers to follow election day procedures.

ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Igor Dzundev, Director for Multilateral Relations

Igor Popovski, Councilor, Chief of Unit

Sasko Tasulov, Head of Sector for OSCE and Council of Europe

Ministry of Justice

Biljana Briskoska-Boskovski, Deputy Minister

Ministry of Internal Affairs

Salji Ramadani, Assistant Minister, European Union and International Co-operation Department

Dusko Lazareski, Head of Police Affairs

State Election Commission

Nikola Rilkoski, President

Subhi Jakupi, Vice-president

Vlatko Soskoski, Member

State Audit Office

Aleksander Popovski, Secretary General

Cveta Ristovska, Assistant to Auditor General

Political Parties

Bilall Kasami, BESA Movement

Afrim Gashi, BESA Movement

Luan Tresi, DPA

Ziadin Sela, Democratic Party of Albanians – Reform Movement

Ali Ahmeti, DUI

Artan Grubi, DUI

Vesel Memedi, NDR

Zoran Zaev, SDSM

Damjan Manchevski, SDSM

Nikola Todorov, VMRO-DPMNE

Antonio Milososki, VMRO-DPMNE

Media

Zoran Trajcevski, Director, Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services

Emilija Janevska, Head of Programme Issues, Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services

Milka Smilevska, Correspondent, Al Jazeera Balkans

Vasko Popetrevski, *Alsati*-MTV

Dragan Sekulovski, Executive Director, Association of Journalists

Petrit Sarachini, Independent journalist

Zaharija Vulgarakis, Director of MTV, Macedonian Radio and Television

Dime Ratajkoski, Editor-in-Chief of MTV1, Macedonian Radio and Television

Dushko Arsovski, Editor, Daily News Programme, Macedonian Radio and Television

Naser Selmani, President, Association of Journalists

Civil Society

Ruzica Stojanovska, Ohrid Institute for Economic Strategies and International Affairs

Neda Calovska, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
Zlatko Dimitrioski, MOST

International Community

H.E. Ambassador Nina Suomalainen, Head of Mission, OSCE Mission to Skopje

H.E. Ambassador Marianne Berez, Deputy Head of Mission, OSCE Mission to Skopje

Peter Vanhoutte, Mediator, European Union

Representatives of diplomatic missions of OSCE participating States, the European Union and NATO