



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

PRESS RELEASE

Macedonian parliamentary elections largely in line with international standards

SKOPJE, 16 September 2002 – Yesterday's parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were largely in line with international standards, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a statement issued today (attached). More than 800 international observers monitored the polls in what was the largest election observation mission ever deployed in Europe.

"The citizens of this country have achieved a successful electoral process which could represent a major step towards restoring stability, reconciliation and democracy in the country", said Kimmo Kiljunen, Vice President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and Special Coordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to lead the OSCE Observation Mission. "The small number of extremists responsible for violence during the past few weeks and days must not be allowed to jeopardize this achievement."

"Despite a difficult political and security background, the electoral process showed commendable resilience throughout the campaign, which contributed substantially to a largely trouble-free election day", added Julian Peel Yates, who is heading the long-term observation mission of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). "Any election-related disputes must be resolved quickly so that there is no doubt about the results."

"We are confident that these elections will contribute significantly to the ongoing process of reconciliation after last year's crisis", said Björn von der Esch, the head of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's delegation.

"It is crucial now that the new Parliament takes up its work swiftly and that all its members, fully aware of their responsibilities towards their common State, tackle the reforms needed for the implementation of the Association and Stabilization Agreement with the EU", said Doris Pack, the head of the delegation of the European Parliament.

Among the positive aspects of the electoral process highlighted by the International Observation Mission were the new election system adopted earlier this year, the exemplary work of the State Election Commission, as well as the electoral campaign which was well organized and appropriately policed.

However, the observers also expressed concern about a number of violent incidents which at times marred the election campaign and created a tense atmosphere. These incidents included the killing of police officers, hostage taking, and attacks on party offices and media representatives. While the media as a whole offered a wide range of information and views, the state media coverage of the campaign was biased in favour of the incumbents.

Election day was characterized by a high turnout of voters, few and isolated incidents of violence, and in general an orderly process, except for a high incidence of group voting.

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