



Macedonia Field Office
Dame Gruev 7
1000 Skopje
Phone: +389 (2) 131 177
Fax: +389 (2) 128 333
www.ndi.org

NDI International Pre-Election Mission Appeals for Calm to Ensure a Better Future

For Immediate Release
August 29, 2002

Skopje, Macedonia...The leader of an international mission to monitor the election campaign in Macedonia sounded today a note of alarm and appealed to political leaders to exercise caution in their actions and statements.

“So much good work has been done,” noted Speaker of the Assembly of Northern Ireland Lord John Alderdice, “but recent violent incidents threaten to damage the prospects for this very important election.” He appealed to Macedonians not to let go of this chance for a better future for Macedonia.

The report released today by the NDI delegation, which includes Cedric Thornberry, a former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Karan English, a former member of the U.S. Congress, states that much has already been achieved to support free and fair elections including 29 parties signing a Code of Conduct for Free and Fair Elections, an increase in the number of women as candidates, the coordination of rallies by opposing political parties, a State Election Commission that is transparent and has generated confidence in the election process, large numbers of citizens checking their names on the Voters List, the participation of political parties in campaign training programs, a growing number of citizens volunteering to monitor the election and the active involvement of trade unions in the campaign.

But the report also warns that the political environment remains volatile and fragile after last year’s crisis and cautions that events this week, such as the murder of two policemen, attacks on political party offices, roadblocks and threats of violence against citizens seeking to participate in political rallies have heightened tensions throughout the country and seriously call into question how much freedom of movement and political activity there can be during this campaign.

The mission, which conducted meetings August 24-28 in Skopje, Tetovo and Strumica, with political party representatives, election administration officials, media representatives, representatives of trade unions and civic groups, government officials, members of the diplomatic community and international organizations concluded that:

- Important steps have been taken to prevent manipulation of elections and to increase transparency of election administration although the performance of the overall election administration can be judged only after election day;
- There are some outstanding concerns including the availability of time and resources for proper training of all election officials; the potential for confusion at polling places because of changes in election-day procedures; the inability of election boards to replace spoiled ballots;

- The media have been captured by various interests which makes them biased; there isn't equal access to the media, especially for small parties;
- Improvements have been made to address citizens concerns about police and security forces such as the integration of greater numbers of ethnic Albanians and the creation of mixed patrols; the Ministry of Interior stated that they have no plans to use special security forces in the election;
- International election observation alone cannot prevent irregularities or fraud; domestic monitoring through Citizens Association MOST should be encouraged.

The purpose of this international delegation was to express the interest of the international community in and support for a democratic election process in Macedonia, to assess the political environment surrounding the upcoming election and the state of electoral readiness and to make recommendations for change or improvement where appropriate while recognizing that it will be the people of Macedonia who will determine the legitimacy of the election process.

For more than 15 years NDI has conducted international election observation programs, including pre-election missions, around the world including Central and Eastern Europe.

NDI is working in Macedonia with political parties and Citizens Association MOST to encourage a peaceful campaign and Election Day.

For more information contact:
Sheila Fruman, Director
02.131.177