

**COALITION "CITIZENS FOR CITIZENS"  
PRELIMINARY REPORT  
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, FIRST ROUND  
SKOPJE, MACEDONIA  
11 September 2000**

Below please find a preliminary report from the domestic monitoring coalition 'Citizens for Citizens'. With support from NDI field representatives, Paul Gill, Victoria Ayer and Rick Stoddard, 'Citizens for Citizens' successfully initiated a non-partisan election monitoring project for Macedonia's first round of municipal elections held on September 10th.

The report highlights the widespread practice of group voting that the coalition witnessed throughout all regions of Macedonia.

---

The Coalition **Citizens for Citizens**, composed of 7 registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) initiated a non-partisan election monitoring project for yesterday's first round of municipal elections. Citizens for Citizens deployed over 1400 accredited monitors throughout the Republic of Macedonia, monitoring events in nearly 25% of the country's polling places. At the time of the writing of this report, the Coalition Headquarters had received reports from approximately 1100 of the monitors. Logistical issues have delayed the receipt of the rest and they will be included in the final report. During the course of day, monitors for Citizens for Citizens watched as the citizens of Macedonia went to the polls to choose their municipal leaders. The Coalition entered the final weeks of the campaign optimistic as to the electoral process and confident that the organization was ready for the challenges inherent in a major election monitoring campaign. On Sunday night, the Coalition recognized that its optimism and confidence had been misplaced.

While some of the media reports have been dominated by the reports of violence, and the Coalition expresses its disappointment over these acts, the Coalition wishes to highlight the widespread problem of group voting. Group voting is when more than one person goes behind the voting screen to mark the ballot. Group voting is a concern because another individual is able to exert a large degree of influence over the selection of the candidate. Ultimately, this is a threat to the basis of democracy, that is, "one person, one vote." Group voting occurred across the country and has become so pervasive that many election officials appeared as if they did not recognize it as improper.

In addition to the widespread practice of group voting throughout all regions of the country, several problems arose in regards to the admission of our monitors to observe the voting and counting processes. We are concerned about this problem and we will be addressing this problem with the State Electoral Commission (SEC) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Coalition hopes that we will not encounter such problems in the future.

Below is a summary of the Coalition's activities based on the information that was available at 0200 this morning. More reports are still arriving so we must emphasize that this is a preliminary report.

We also wish to note that the Coalition is unable to comment on events that were not directly observed by the Coalition monitors.

## **Deployment and Problems by Region**

**Bitola:** 84 monitors were deployed by the Coalition to visit 49 polling stations around Bitola. The regional coordinator characterized the elections as fair and free with no reports of serious wrong-doing witnessed by the Coalition monitors beyond a broken ballot box and a wide number of minor irregularities such as difficulty in understanding the election law and following the proper procedure. Group voting was observed.

**Debar:** The Coalition deployed 25 monitors that visited all of the polling stations in the municipality. Reports from our monitors indicate that voting was going smoothly until groups broke the ballot boxes and the Municipal Electoral Committee was forced to close all the polling stations following a shooting.

**Gevgelija:** Over 80 volunteer monitors from the Coalition observed Election Day activities at all of the polling stations at some point. No problems beyond minor irregularities were observed and reported to the Coalition headquarters.

**Gostivar:** The Coalition deployed 49 monitors that witnessed proceedings at 25 polling stations. Our monitors witnessed numerous minor and more serious problems such as instances of group voting, voting without proper identification, and voting twice. The political fight between the major parties became physical as a fist-fight was seen between one party supporter and a rival council candidate. At another location, a fight broke out between two party representatives.

**Kicevo:** A combination of mobile and stationary teams composed of 50 Coalition monitors managed to cover approximately 50 polling stations in the Kicevo area. Beyond those problems, which have been identified as endemic to the entire election process, the monitors in Kicevo did not observe any significant problems.

**Kumanovo:** Activity on election day was quieter in the Kumanovo region than in other parts of Macedonia. Approximately 130 monitors were deployed to visit 90 polling stations. At most polling places, minor irregularities were observed, but no major attempts at fraud or disruption were reported.

**Ohrid:** Our Coalition partners in Ohrid organized to monitor 43 of 101 polling sites utilizing 43 volunteer observers. The monitors did not report any serious issues or irregularities as the proceedings generally went smoothly with the exception of isolated problems such as a lack of proper election posters.

**Prilep:** Our 80 monitors observed electoral processes at 42 of 153 polling places in the area. The volunteer monitors came from five different NGOs highlighting the diversity of the Coalition and its efforts for this election.

**Skopje-Chair:** The coalition had extensive coverage throughout the Chair municipality, utilizing volunteers from three different NGOs covering over half of the polling stations, and was in a position to witness a variety of troubling problems. A large number of political party supporters congregated at one polling place where they engaged in acts designed to disrupt the proper electoral process. Group voting and proxy voting was observed as well as voter intimidation. Voters were denied their right to cast their ballots in secrecy and election officials denied one group of monitors the

opportunity to observe the proceedings, in spite of their proper accreditation. The denial of access to accredited observers and the practice of group voting is particularly troubling as it directly calls into question the transparency of the electoral process.

**Skopje-Kisela Voda:** Agitated political party supporters in front of one polling station was the most serious problem witnessed by Coalition observers in this Skopje municipality. Fifty monitors were deployed to a sampling of 25 polling stations and did not observe much beyond minor irregularities.

**Stip:** The Coalition was able to get nearly complete coverage of the Stip area using 50 volunteer observers. Although no major problems were observed by our monitors, concerns were raised over the degree to which voting was conducted secretly. As was the case throughout the country, many polling places did not utilize the optimal means of insuring a secret ballot. Electoral officials then compound the problem when they do not strictly enforce the various election laws.

**Struga:** Our Coalition deployed approximately 90 monitors from two organizations to cover many of the polling places in the Struga area. Voting in the Struga area proceeded with an enormous number of minor irregularities and several more substantial allegations of wrong-doing. One monitor submitted a lengthy account outlining how various political parties engaged in ballot stuffing and group voting. The monitor further reported that ballots were issued either with questionable identification or without any identification at all, including some youth who appeared well below the voting age of 18. Finally, gunfire was reported in one village.

**Strumica:** The Strumica region was covered by approximately 75 volunteer monitors visiting 60% of the polling stations in the area. The monitors did not report observing any extra-ordinary activity or problems on election day.

**Tetovo:** The Tetovo region represented one of the larger efforts within the monitoring project. One hundred-twenty monitors drawn from several of the member NGOs and placed in multi-ethnic teams worked to monitor the voting and counting activities at over fifty polling stations. Cases of gunfire at Poroj and allegations of ballot stuffing in another town were some of the most serious problems encountered by the Coalition monitors in the region. Additionally, in two instances, monitoring teams were intimidated from observing the count process.

**Veles:** The Coalition was able to deploy 162 monitors to all 74 polling stations in the area. Our monitors did not report any major electoral issues other than the frequent practice of group voting and some sporadic identification problems.

### **About the Coalition “Citizens for Citizens”**

The Coalition Citizens for Citizens was formed in August 2000 to combine the efforts of 7 Macedonia-based non-governmental organizations from throughout the country. The organizations involved include: the Youth Council of Macedonia, Center for Balkanic Cooperation- Loja (Tetovo), the Union of Women’s Organizations of Macedonia (Skopje), European House, Association for Development of Democratic (Gevgalija), State Center for Protection of the Rights of the Roma, and the Union of Non-Governmental Organizations in Veles.

The Coalition is led by a coordinating committee composed of representatives from the various constituent NGOs. Support for the monitoring project came from a number of sources including, the

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the Institute for Sustainable Communities, the Norwegian Embassy, the Canadian Embassy, the Open Society Institute, and the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation.

Copyright © 2000 National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for non-commercial purposes provided that NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and is sent copies of any translation.