



**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

Ul. Dame Gruev 7, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia
Tel: +389.2 131.177 Fax: +389.2.128.333
E-mail: ndi@ndi.org.mk

**STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL
PRE-ELECTION DELEGATION
TO MACEDONIA**

Skopje, August 29, 2002

This statement is offered by an international pre-election delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in advance of parliamentary elections in Macedonia scheduled for September 15, 2002. The mission has been led by Lord John Alderdice, Speaker of the Assembly of Northern Ireland and member of the British House of Lords. The other members of the delegation are Karan English, former member of the U.S. Congress and Assistant Director of the Center for Sustainable Environments at Northern Arizona University; Cedric Thornberry, a former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General who was Deputy Chief of Mission and Head of Civil Affairs for the UN throughout ex-Yugoslavia (including Macedonia); and Eric Bjornlund, former NDI Senior Associate. The delegation has been joined by Sheila Fruman, NDI/Macedonia Country Director, and Tara Gingerich, Program Officer at NDI in Washington, DC.

OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Much has been achieved in Macedonia in recent months to support free and fair elections. Despite this progress recent violent incidents threaten to damage the prospects for this very important election. During the course of this mission the delegation has observed how volatile and fragile the political environment in Macedonia remains. The murders this week of two policemen near Gostivar, attacks on political party offices in Skopje, and 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, assembly and political activity there can be during this campaign. In such a tense situation there is a heightened responsibility on all political leaders to exercise the utmost caution in their public statements to ensure that they do not contribute to the destabilization of the political environment.

This marked deterioration in the situation is particularly disappointing given some of the steps that have been taken in recent months that have at times provided cause for measured optimism that the upcoming election will mark an improvement from previous elections. In July, for example, 29 political parties from across the political and ethnic spectrum signed a Code of Conduct for Free and Fair Elections, committing themselves to peaceful political competition. Likewise, the leading political parties have engaged with the international community and have participated in internationally supported training programs. Many citizens throughout the country have volunteered to join a non-partisan domestic election monitoring effort. Many more have exercised their legal right to examine the voters list. Considerable numbers of women in political parties, the government and civic groups have

worked together to raise public awareness about the political empowerment of women and have created opportunities for increased participation by women in political life; one result is the substantial increase in the number of women running for Parliament. Trade unions have engaged constructively in the campaign and have attracted increased attention from political parties. During the first week of the official campaign period, the main political parties coordinated the timing and location of rallies with each other, which helped ensure that those rallies were peaceful. These developments reflect the electorate's strong desire for a peaceful and meaningful campaign as well as the capacity of political parties to maintain such an environment.

BACKGROUND

The brief but violent ethnic conflict in Macedonia ended only last summer, and the country's longer-term transition to a stable democracy remains fragile. The conflict and the process by which it was resolved continue to shape many elements of the political environment. Force continues to play a disturbingly large role in Macedonian politics, including the election environment. Its presence affects not only the actions of the political parties but also potentially the ability of citizens to engage freely in the political process. The transition to a stable democratic society requires further movement from the law of force to the force of law.

As the country approaches its first election since the conflict, it is crucial for the electorate to have confidence that the election process is free and fair and for the newly elected government to take up its mandate peacefully.

Inter-ethnic tensions remain and are used by some parties to fuel provocative and destructive political rhetoric, but there is also real danger of violence arising primarily from political battles within the ethnic Macedonian community and within the ethnic Albanian community.

OBSERVATIONS

A fair and complete assessment of any election must take into account all aspects of the process. This includes voting, counting and tabulation on election day. Equally significant are the elements of the process before election day, such as the establishment of the legal framework for elections and the political environment before and during the campaign, and the elements after election day, including the investigation and resolution of complaints and respect for the results. This delegation has focused on the elements of the process to date and does not purport to prejudge the overall election process.

Below are the findings and recommendations of the delegation on several important elements of the pre-election period.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Macedonia has taken important steps in the last year to prevent manipulation of elections, to increase the transparency of election administration and to enhance voter confidence in the entire election process. Virtually everyone with whom the delegation met expressed confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the State Election Commission (SEC) led by Mirjana Lazarova-Trajkovska. In the short time since its formation on July 12, the SEC has appointed lower-level election authorities, issued necessary guidelines to supplement the election law, established an information and press center, created a website, initiated voter

education programs, planned training for election officials, produced election materials and arranged election logistics. The performance of the subordinate election bodies can be judged only after election day on the basis of their performance in the administration of the elections themselves.

Regarding administration of the election, the delegation heard a number of specific concerns. These included:

- The availability of adequate time and resources for proper training of all election officials;
- The potential for confusion of voters at polling places because of the many significant changes in election-day procedures since the last elections; and
- The inability of the election boards to replace spoiled ballots due to the election law's requirement that the number of ballots provided to each polling station exactly match the number of voters on the voter list for such polling station.

The delegation was also troubled by the inappropriate inclusion on the voter list of approximately 3,200 voters with home addresses listed as the address of the Ministry of Interior. We note that the problem was discovered and remedied.

The SEC plans to broadcast voter education programs. In addition to addressing broader concerns, such as encouraging voter participation and prevention of violence, we hope that the broadcast voter education campaign will also address the substantial new election-day procedures faced by the voters under the new election law.

While the SEC has accomplished a great deal to date, the short time between its establishment and election day has posed a serious challenge. A standing SEC will require its own office space, a core of permanent professional staff, and the necessary budget and resources to sustain them.

We note that many of the resources for this election were provided and administered by the international community. While this support was critical for this election and was welcomed by the election authorities, such extensive foreign assistance and involvement in the future are neither sustainable nor desirable.

MEDIA

The news media are essential to the provision of adequate and accurate information that makes it possible for citizens to make a free choice at the ballot box. In open and democratic societies, the media have a role and a responsibility to provide accurate and balanced news coverage of political contestants and issues that affect voter choices. Professional responsibility is the key to this effort, and the professionalism of the Macedonian media – both state-owned and private – is in question in this campaign.

In our meetings we encountered widespread concerns, which were confirmed by ministers and the State Broadcasting Council, that the media have allowed themselves to be captured by various interests. The understanding of the electorate that each media outlet has a particular bias does not minimize the media's failure in this regard. An additional concern is that smaller political parties do not have meaningful access to any media outlets or the resources necessary to ensure substantial media coverage. The delegation is concerned that

the media are not fulfilling their responsibility to provide fair treatment and open access. If the media do not show that they have the capacity to provide such access, it is likely that the question will arise after the election whether the media are capable of self-regulation.

POLICE AND SECURITY

In the wake of last year's conflict, the state authorities have made a significant effort to improve the security situation and to address citizens' concerns about the police and security forces. Authorities have integrated greater numbers of ethnic Albanians into the police forces and have created mixed patrols. The police requested and received training from the international community to prepare for the upcoming elections.

With respect to security, protection and transportation of ballots and other election materials, the responsible police authorities have assured us that proper mechanisms are in place.

We heard concerns about special security forces and paramilitary groups. Many citizens find such forces intimidating, and their presence at rallies and other political events diminishes rather than enhances citizens' sense of security. We welcome the assurances of the Ministry of the Interior that they have no plans to use special security forces in connection with the election. The exclusive reliance on regular police forces on election day is essential to providing a normal context for elections.

This election gives an opportunity for the Macedonian police force to demonstrate its capacity and commitment to provide security throughout the country.

MONITORING OF THE ELECTION

In politically uncertain environments, monitoring of elections by both domestic and international nonpartisan observers, as well as party poll watchers, can help deter fraud on election day and contribute to public confidence in the integrity of the process.

The scale of the planned international monitoring effort for this election is almost unprecedented. While virtually everyone with whom we met welcomed the participation of international observers, we are concerned about the unrealistic expectations that many political leaders and citizens place upon international observation and its ability to prevent fraud. It is important to recognize that international observation on its own cannot prevent electoral irregularities or fraud.

The civic organization MOST is playing an important role in helping to increase confidence and participation in the election process. Following a successful campaign to encourage citizens to check the voters list, the group plans a nationwide domestic monitoring effort. As part of this effort, the group will conduct an independent verification of the polling results based on a large statistical sample of polling sites (a parallel vote tabulation or PVT). We encourage the widespread participation of citizens in this domestic monitoring effort.

THE WORK OF THE DELEGATION

The delegation made its observations and findings based upon analysis of the legal framework for the election; review of materials on Macedonia's election process produced by other international organizations, domestic and international press and impartial domestic

election monitoring organizations; and analysis of information presented during the delegations' meetings in the country. While the role of the delegation was informed by the activities of NDI staff in the country over the past nine years, it is distinct from NDI's other programs in Macedonia.

The delegation visited Macedonia and conducted meetings in Skopje, Strumica and Tetevo from August 24 through August 29. It met with the State Election Commission and subordinate election administration bodies; officials from the Ministry of Interior and Justice; representatives of governing and opposition political parties including VMRO- Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP), Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); representatives of trade unions and civic groups concerned with the political situation and election process; representatives of the media; members of the diplomatic community and representatives of international organizations. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to everyone with whom it has met for sharing their time and their views.

The purposes of this international delegation were to express the interest of the international community in and support for a democratic election process in Macedonia, to assess the evolving political environment surrounding the upcoming election, as well as the state of electoral preparations, to offer an accurate and impartial statement of its observations, and to make recommendations for improvement or change where appropriate. The delegation conducted its activities according to Macedonian law and international standards for nonpartisan election observation. The Institute does not seek to interfere in the election process or, at this juncture, to make a final assessment about the process. NDI recognizes that, ultimately, it will be the people of Macedonia who will determine the legitimacy of the election process.

NDI IN MACEDONIA

Since beginning its work in Macedonia in 1993, NDI has focused its efforts on the long-term development of a representative and multi-party democratic political society, the building of an active and engaged civil society, and the strengthening of core democratic institutions such as the parliament. From 1998 to 2002, NDI has addressed these broad goals across the political spectrum in Macedonia through political party assistance and assistance to party caucuses in parliament, work with local NGO partners and civic coalitions to promote democratic electoral standards and citizen engagement, and through strengthening the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the parliament. To promote the integrity of the electoral process in advance of the parliamentary election, NDI has been working with political parties and civil society organizations in the months before the election to encourage a peaceful and fair campaign period and Election Day.

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