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Observation of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia (21 January 2007)

Report
Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau of the Assembly
Rapporteur: Mr Tadeusz IWŃSKI, Poland, Socialist Group

The parliamentary elections in Serbia on 21 January 2007 were in line with Council of Europe standards and commitments for democratic elections. The citizens of Serbia could freely and fairly choose between a wide and pluralist range of political platforms on Election Day. The efficient and transparent manner in which these elections were organised contributed to the high level of confidence of the public and electoral stakeholders in the election administration and impartial conduct of these elections.

The Law on the Election of Representatives provides important safeguards to promote democratic election practices, but some provisions do not fully comply with Council of Europe standards and best practices for democratic elections. The newly elected Parliament should address, in consultation with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the shortcomings as identified in the Venice Commission's opinion on the Law on Election of Representatives.

I. Introduction

1. Following an invitation by the Republic Election Commission of the Republic of Serbia, the Bureau of the Assembly decided, at its meeting on 21 November 2006, to set up an ad hoc Committee to observe the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia, scheduled for 21 January 2007. At its meeting on 15 December 2006, the Bureau appointed me as the Chairman and Rapporteur of the ad hoc Committee.

2. On 4 October 2004, a co-operation agreement was signed between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law ("Venice Commission"). In conformity with Article 15 of the agreement: "When the Bureau of the Assembly decides to observe an election in a country in which electoral legislation was previously examined by the Venice Commission, one of the rapporteurs of the Venice Commission on this issue may be invited to join the Assembly's election observation mission as legal adviser", the Bureau of the Assembly invited an expert from the Venice Commission to join the ad hoc Committee as advisor.

3. Based on the proposals by the political groups in the Assembly, the ad hoc Committee was composed as follows:

Socialist Group (SOC)

Mr Sead AVDIĆ	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ms Meritxell BATET	Spain
Mr Andreas GROSS	Switzerland
Mr Tadeusz IWŃSKI	Poland

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

Mr Pedro AGRAMUNT	Spain
Ms Corien W.A. JONKER	Netherlands
Mr Andrea RIGONI	Italy
Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS	Lithuania
Mr Piotr WACH	Poland

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON	United Kingdom
Mr Morten ØSTERGAARD	Denmark
Mr Johannes RANDEGGER	Switzerland
Mr Gheorghe Adrian MIUTESCU	Romania

European Democratic Group (EDG)

Mr Christopher CHOPE	United Kingdom
Mr Nigel EVANS	United Kingdom
Mr Morten MESSERSCHMIDT	Denmark
Mrs Ewa TOMASZEWSKA	Poland

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

Mr Alexander FOMENKO	Russian Federation
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Secretariat

Mr Vladimir DRONOV, Head of Secretariat, Senior Advisor to the President of the Assembly
Mr Bas KLEIN, Deputy to the Head of Secretariat of the Interparliamentary Cooperation Department
Mr Serguei KOUZNETSOV, Administrator, Venice Commission
Ms Daniele GASTL, Assistant

4. The ad hoc Committee acted as part of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), which also included the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE-PA), the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the election observation mission of the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

5. The ad hoc Committee met in Belgrade from 19 to 22 January 2007 and held, *inter alia*, meetings with representatives of the main parties participating in these elections, the Serbian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Secretary and members of the Republic Election Commission (REC), the Head of the Election Observation Mission of the OSCE/ODIHR and his staff, the Head of the OSCE Mission, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) of the Council of Europe in Belgrade, as well as representatives of civil society and the mass media. The programme of the meetings of the ad hoc Committee appears in Appendix 1.

6. On Election Day, the ad hoc Committee was split into 11 teams which observed the elections in and around Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis, Vranje and Novi Pazar. In addition one of the 11 observer teams was deployed in Kosovo (Gnjilane)

7. In order to draw up an assessment of the electoral campaign, as well as the political climate in the run-up to the elections, the Bureau sent a pre-electoral mission to Serbia from 18 to 20 December 2006. The cross-party pre-electoral delegation consisted of Tadeusz Iwiński (Poland, SOC), Head of Delegation, Corien Jonker (Netherlands, EPP/CD) and Helena Bargholtz (Sweden, ALDE). Regrettably, due to unforeseen circumstances the European Democrat Group (EDG) and the Unified European Left (UEL) could not be represented on the pre-election mission. In Belgrade, the pre-electoral delegation met with, *inter alia*, representatives of political parties participating in these elections, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Secretary of the Republican Election Commission, the President of the Supreme Court, the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Serbian delegation to PACE, the SRSG of the Council of Europe, the European Commission Delegation in Belgrade and representatives of the mass media and NGO community, as well as ambassadors from Council of Europe member states accredited in Serbia. The conclusions of the pre-electoral mission were presented by me in a memorandum to the Bureau of the Assembly (AS/Bur/AhSer (2006) 5) and a statement was issued by the pre-electoral delegation at the end of their stay, which appears in Appendix 2.

8. The IEOM concluded that the Parliamentary Elections in Serbia on 21 January 2007 were in line with international standards. The citizens of Serbia could freely and fairly make their choice on Election Day from a wide and pluralist range of political platforms. The joint IEOM press release issued after these elections appears in Appendix 3.

9. The ad hoc Committee wishes to thank the Special Envoy of the San Marino Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission and the SRSG of the Council of Europe in Belgrade and the staff of the Council of Europe office for their co-operation and the support provided to the ad hoc Committee.

II. Political and legal context

10. The elections on 21 January were the first parliamentary elections to take place since the dissolution of the State Union between Serbia and Montenegro. They took place in the context of the expectations regarding the outcome of the negotiations on the future status of Kosovo, and the expected publication, on 2 February 2007, of the proposals of UN Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, for the resolution of this issue.

11. Serbia adopted a new Constitution after a Constitutional Referendum on 28 and 29 October 2006. The Parliamentary Assembly observed the conduct of this referendum. In its report (Doc 11102 (2006)), the ad hoc Committee that observed the Constitutional Referendum concluded that the referendum was generally conducted with due respect for Serbia's democratic commitments to the Council of Europe, but was concerned that the decision to hold an early vote on the Constitution did not allow for a proper public debate and reflection period, as required by Council of Europe standards for the conduct of referenda.

12. On 10 November 2006, the President of the Republic of Serbia called for early parliamentary elections on 21 January 2007, in line with the transitional provisions for the implementation of the new Constitution. These same transitional provisions also prescribe that the newly elected Parliament is to (re-) appoint a number of officials in other state institutions, including the judges on the Supreme and Constitutional Courts.

13. The National Assembly, or Parliament, of Serbia is a unicameral body consisting of 250 members, elected in a single national constituency, on the basis of a system of proportional representation with a 5% threshold.

14. The parliamentary elections are governed by the Law on Election of Representatives (the Election Law) adopted in 2000 and last amended in 2004, as well as regulations issued by the Republican Election Commission. In its joint opinion on the Election Law with the OSCE/ODIHR, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe concluded that the Election Law, as amended, provides

important safeguards to promote democratic election practices, including measures to enhance the transparency in the organisation and conduct of the election and to protect the secrecy of the vote. However, the joint opinion also noted a number of provisions in the Election Law that do not fully comply with Council of Europe standards and best practise for democratic elections.

15. A main shortcoming of the Election Law concerns the allocation of seats after the elections take place. Article 84 of the Election Law allows a party, or party coalition, to arbitrarily choose which members of its list will become members of parliament, instead of determining the order of candidates before the elections take place. This runs counter to Council of Europe standards and best practices as it limits the transparency of the system for the voters. In addition, it gives disproportionate control of the parties over their candidates and undermines the intention of the gender quota for elections lists, as mandated by the Election Law.

16. In order to promote the participation of ethnic minorities, amendments to the Election Law were adopted in 2004 that waive the 5% threshold to enter parliament for "*political parties of ethnic minorities and coalitions of parties of ethnic minorities*". While this is an improvement, the Election Law fails to provide a definition for a "*party of ethnic minorities*". This, in turn, leaves too much discretion to the Republican Election Commission to decide which parties and coalitions constitute "*parties and coalitions of ethnic minorities*" and which do not.

17. The ad hoc Committee welcomes the provisions in the Election law that stipulate that at least 30% of the candidates on an electoral list should belong to the under-represented gender. However, as mentioned above, the positive effect of these provisions is undermined by the possibility for parties to arbitrarily distribute their mandates among the candidates on their list after the elections.

III. Election administration

18. The parliamentary elections in Serbia are administered by a two-tiered election administration, consisting of the Republic Election Commission (REC) and 8,531 Polling Boards (PBs). The REC is composed of a chairperson and 16 permanent members. In addition, the Election Law stipulates that, after the approval of the electoral lists, each registered list can appoint a representative as an extended member of the REC with the same voting rights as the permanent REC members. The PBs are composed in a similar manner as the REC. The permanent composition of a PB consists of a chairperson and 2 members, each with a deputy.

19. Unlike for presidential elections, for parliamentary elections the Election Law does not provide for an intermediate level of election administration between the REC and PBs. The REC tried to overcome this shortcoming by appointing ad hoc Working groups on the level of each municipality. These working groups functioned as a de facto intermediate level of election administration. However, the composition and functioning of these ad hoc working groups are not regulated by the Election Law.

20. The REC established 267 PBs in 22 of the 29 municipalities in Kosovo. For the purpose of these elections, Kosovo was divided into two administrative districts. The REC co-ordinators for these administrative districts were based in Raška and Vranje, which are located outside Kosovo.

21. The Election Law provides for out-of-country voting for the Serbian diaspora. In total, 56 polling stations were opened in diplomatic representations of Serbia in 34 countries, including 6 in Montenegro.

22. The REC conducted its work in a professional, unbiased and transparent manner. The extended composition of the election administration significantly contributed to the high confidence of the public and electoral stakeholders in the impartiality of the election administration.

IV. Candidate and voter registration

23. The REC registered 20 parties and party coalitions for these elections, which provided for a genuinely pluralistic and competitive electoral environment.

24. In a move that gave rise to some controversy, the REC issued a decree that lowered the signature requirements for ethnic minority parties from 10.000, as prescribed by law, to 3.000. In total, 4 of the 6 ethnic minority parties participating in these elections took advantage of these lower requirements and were registered with less than 10.000 signatures. Several complaints were filed questioning the legality of the REC decision to lower the signature requirements for ethnic minority parties. However, the Supreme Court of Serbia upheld the REC decision, stating that the legal requirement of 10.000 signatures for ethnic minority parties would run counter to international provisions on minority rights.

25. The lowering of the signature requirement and abolition of the 5% threshold provided an opportunity for several of these parties to run independently and not as part of a coalition with one of the larger parties as in the past. In this respect, the ad hoc Committee welcomes the registration of the Coalition of Albanians from the Prešovo Valley, which is the first time an Albanian party participated in national elections since 1997.

26. Serbia has a passive voter registration system. Voters' lists are compiled from the civil registry and are maintained on a continuous basis by the municipal authorities. According to the law, the electronic versions of the local voters' lists should be linked into one national voters' register. However, such a national voters' register has not yet been established. The voters' lists were published by the Polling Boards for public inspection and correction up until 5 January 2007. After this deadline, it was still possible to be added to the voters' list, or have one's information updated, by court order up until 18 January 2007. After this date, no further modifications of the voters' lists were allowed by law.

27. Due to its specific situation, no credible voters' lists exist in Kosovo. In 2000, a new voters' registration process was started in 22 Municipalities in Kosovo. In total, 101.688 inhabitants of Kosovo – UNMIK population estimates for Kosovo range from 1.9 to 2.4 million inhabitants - were entered into the civil register and thus were eligible to vote in these elections.

V. Pre-election period and media

28. The campaign atmosphere was calm without any incidents or restrictions and only very few instances of negative campaigning. The active and visible campaign allowed the voters to fully inform themselves about the different political platforms.

29. The expected proposals on the future status of Kosovo were one of the main issues influencing the election campaign, albeit less dominantly than during the campaign for the Constitutional Referendum in October 2006. Calls to retain Kosovo within Serbia were part of most campaign platforms and several party leaders visited Kosovo during the campaign. Other prominent campaign issues were the fight against corruption, European integration and social issues.

30. The Election Law provides for the creation of a Campaign Supervisory Board with the responsibility to supervise the electoral campaign. However, the National Assembly failed to establish this body for these elections.

31. By law, all radio and television stations are required to ensure equal access and coverage for all electoral contestants. Moreover, public media are supposed to provide free airtime to these parties on an equal basis. Public media are by law prohibited to broadcast paid election advertising, although this provision was not always followed. The law also provides for a campaign silence period of 48 hours before Election Day.

32. Television is the most important broadcasting medium in Serbia, while printed press circulation is one of the lowest in Europe. The public broadcasters provided a balanced coverage of the electoral campaign and adhered to legal requirements regarding equal access and coverage.

Most private media provided a relatively balanced coverage of the campaign, albeit with a number of them showing a preference for one party or the other.

VI. Election day – vote count and tabulation

33. On Election Day, the vote took place in a calm and orderly fashion. All observers noted the professional, efficient and transparent manner in which the majority of the PBs conducted the voting process. A minor point of criticism was the inadequacy of voting screens, which at times impeded the secrecy of the vote. In addition, inking procedures, as well as the checking of voters' IDs, were not always followed in all polling stations.

34. As was the case for the vote, the vote count was generally conducted in an efficient and transparent manner. The efficiency of the PBs was evident from the relatively short time it took to finalise the counting procedures in the majority of PBs.

35. In Kosovo the vote took place in a relatively calm atmosphere. However, PACE observers noted that, often, voting and counting procedures were implemented in a rather "informal" fashion and that regulations were not strictly adhered to. In addition, it appeared that there had been last minute changes in the assignment of voters to polling stations, which created a certain amount of confusion among voters.

36. The tabulation of the election results is not the responsibility of the REC but of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. The Election Law does not require the REC to publish the breakdown of the results per polling station when publishing the aggregate results after an election. Publishing the breakdown per polling station would enhance the transparency of the tabulation process, especially as this is not carried out by the REC.

37. According to the preliminary results announced by the REC, when 99.84% of the votes had been counted, the Serbian Radical Party won these elections with 28, 59% of the votes, which translates into 81 seats in the new parliament. The Democratic Party (DS) won 22.71% of the votes (64 seats); the Democratic Party of Serbia – New Serbia (DSS-NS) 16.55% (47 seats); G17+ won 6.82 % (19 seats); the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) 5.31% (15 seats); and the coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party, Civic Alliance of Serbia, Social Democratic Union and League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina won 5.31 % (15 seats). Of the ethnic minority parties, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians won 1.3% (3 seats); the coalition List for Sandzak 0.84% (2 seats); the Roma Union of Serbia 0.42% (1 seat); the Albanian Coalition from Prešovo Valley 0.42% (1 seat); and the Roma Party 0.36% (1 seat). All other parties failed to pass the threshold, or, in the case of the ethnic minority parties, to gain sufficient votes to win a seat in Parliament.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

38. The Parliamentary elections in Serbia on 21 January 2007 were in line with Council of Europe standards and commitments for democratic elections. The citizens of Serbia could freely and fairly choose between a wide and pluralist range of political platforms on Election Day. The efficient and transparent manner in which these elections were organised contributed to the high level of confidence of the public and electoral stakeholders in the election administration and impartial conduct of these elections.

39. The Law on the Election of Representatives provides important safeguards to promote democratic election practices, but some provisions do not fully comply with Council of Europe standards and best practices for democratic elections. The ad hoc Committee therefore calls upon the newly elected Parliament to address, in consultation with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the shortcomings as identified in the Venice Commission's opinion on the Law.

40. The ad hoc Committee welcomes the measures taken to increase the participation of ethnic minorities in these elections, which clearly have borne results. With regard to lowering the signature requirement for the registration of ethnic minority parties, the ad hoc Committee, while supporting the intentions underlying this measure, considers that signature requirements should preferably be dealt with in the Election Law and not in REC regulations. It would therefore recommend that the lower

signature requirement for ethnic minority parties should be codified in the Election Law. This would allay any controversy regarding this issue during future elections.

41. The ad hoc Committee welcomes the pragmatic approach displayed by the REC to the shortcomings in the Election Law regarding the structure of the election administration. However, it would recommend that, for future parliamentary elections, an intermediate level of election administration will be provided for in the Election Law, as is already the case for Presidential elections.

42. The provisions in the Election Law that allow the parties to arbitrarily distribute their mandates among the candidates on their list after the elections have taken place, diminish the transparency of the system for the public and run counter to Council of Europe standards. The ad hoc Committee therefore recommends that the newly elected Parliament abolish this principle in the next revision of the Election Law.

Appendix 1

AD HOC COMMITTEE TO OBSERVE THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

**21 January 2007
PROGRAMME**

Thursday, 18 January 2007

Arrival of the members of the ad hoc Committee

All members will be met at the airport and provided with transport to:

Hotel Majestic

Obilićev Venac 28

Belgrade 11000

Republic of Serbia

Tel: +381 11 3285 777

Fax: +381 11 3284 995

Friday, 19 January 2007

Sava Centre

09:00 ad hoc Committee meeting

Joint Briefing programme

- 10:00 Opening of the meeting by the Heads of Delegations
- Mr Goran LENNMARKER , Head of OSCE PA Delegation
 - Mr Tadeusz IWINSKI, Head of PACE Delegation
- 10:20 Political analysis of the elections by
- Ambassador Hans Ola URSTAD, Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia
 - Mr Denis HUBER, Head of CoE SRSG Office in Serbia
- 11:10. Briefings by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM)
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Meeting with the Republican Election Commission (REC)
- Mr Miodrag PETROVIĆ, Member
 - Mr Marko DANILOVIĆ, Secretary
 - Mr Slobodan VUKADINOVIĆ, International Observers Dept
- 15:30 Individual meetings with political parties
- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| 15:30-15:50 | DSS – NS List |
| 15:50-16:10 | G17 PLUS |
| 16:10-16:30 | Serbian Renewal Movement |
- 16:30 Coffee Break
- 16:45 Individual meetings with political parties and lists
- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| 16:45-17:25 | Socialist Party of Serbia |
| 17:25-17:45 | Democratic Party |
| 17:45-18:05 | LDP – GSS – SDU – LSV |
- 18:30 Adjournment of briefing programme, return to Majestic Hotel by bus

Saturday, 20 January 2007

Sava Center

- 09:00 Meeting with non-parliamentary political party lists / regional parties (20 mins each)
- 09:00-09:20 Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians
 - 09:20-09:40 Coalition List for Sandzak
 - 09:20-09:40 Union of Roma
- 10:00 Meeting with Media Representatives
- RTS
 - B92
 - Vreme
 - Association of Independent Journalist of Serbia
- 11:00 Meetings with NGO representatives
- CeSID
 - Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
 - Centre for Regionalism
 - Youth initiative for Human Rights
- 12:30 Deployment and logistics followed by meeting with drivers/interpreters and deployment to the regions.

Sunday, 21 January 2007

Observation of the Parliamentary Elections

Monday, 22 January 2007

Sava Center

- 08:00 Joint Debriefing
- 13:00 Press Conference

Afternoon

Departure of the members of the ad hoc Committee

Appendix 2

Serbia at the crossroads, according to PACE pre-election delegation

Belgrade, 20.12.06 – The 21 January 2007 parliamentary elections in Serbia will be an important test of Serbia's commitment to further democratisation and continued European integration, concluded a pre-election delegation¹ of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The delegation noted the highly competitive nature of the forthcoming vote, with ten election lists registered so far (several more are expected), offering a solid choice for the electorate. It took note of an amended electoral legislation allowing diaspora voting and of new administrative measures facilitating the representation of ethnic minorities in the future Parliament. It welcomed new regulations ensuring a better gender balance in politics.

The delegation was pleased with an improved media environment, with markedly less interference by the authorities. It was, however, aware of new pressures on the journalistic profession, mainly due to the use of economic levers by vested interests.

The delegation was concerned by the rise of radical sentiments in the Serbian electorate, not least against the backdrop of Serbia's forthcoming Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Serbia will assume the six-month rotating Chairmanship in May 2007.

The delegation was in Serbia from 18 to 21 December 2006 at the invitation of the Secretary of the Republican Electoral Commission of Serbia. It was received by the Speaker of the Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court. The purpose was to assess the political situation in the country in the run-up to the 21 January 2007 elections. Its working programme included meetings with representatives of political parties, high-level government officials, media representatives and members of civil society.

In its exchanges with Serbian official representatives, the delegation evoked the specific conclusion, criticisms and recommendations in the report by the PACE delegation that observed the Serbian constitutional referendum on 28 and 29 October 2006, such as inadequate ballot-box sealing and out-of-date lists. It also called for better training for electoral officials. The delegation received assurances that corrective action will be taken ahead of the 21 January vote to preclude any repetition of shortcomings detected during the referendum and the previous elections of 2003.

A 20-member team of observers from the Parliamentary Assembly will observe the 21 January election in around a dozen localities, possibly including Kosovo.

Contact: Vladimir Dronov, mobile +33 663 49 37 92.

1. Tadeusz Iwinski (Poland, SOC), Head of Delegation, Corien Jonker (Netherlands, EPP/CD), Helena Bargholtz (Sweden, ALDE).

Appendix 3

INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION PRESS RELEASE

Serbia's elections in line with international standards

BELGRADE, 22.01.2007 – The 21 January parliamentary elections in Serbia provided a genuine opportunity for the citizens of Serbia to choose from a range of political platforms and were in line with OSCE commitments and Council of Europe's standards for democratic elections. Still, a few issues in the election legislation remain to be addressed. Those are the conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission, IEOM, announced in Belgrade today.

"The elections in Serbia were free and fair," said OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Göran Lennmarker, Special Co-Ordinator of the OSCE short-term observers. "I was personally impressed and proud on behalf of the Serb people for the professional, orderly and well-organized way they carried out this election. It bodes well for Serbia's future."

Tadeusz Iwinski, Head of the Delegation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, PACE, added: "The way the parliamentary elections were held in Serbia proves that the country has made significant progress towards ensuring a free expression of the will of the electorate, whose active participation in the vote shows its intense involvement in determining the vector of their country's development. All this is extremely important in the light of Serbia's upcoming chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe that starts in May 2007."

"The members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly were glad to be observing these elections that were free and fair", said Assen Agov, Head of the Assembly's Delegation. "It was the first vote after Serbia was invited to join the Partnership for Peace. We share the conclusions of the IEOM and look forward to working with the new Serbian parliament."

"The ODIHR sent an experienced and committed team of observers here. Their findings address the entire election process, including issues that need future attention but are, on the whole, a compliment to the democratic standards that Serbia has reached", concluded Ambassador Geert Ahrens. He heads the long-term election observation mission deployed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR, in mid-December.

Six out of twenty political parties and coalitions represented minorities, and for the first time in recent years Albanian minority parties contested national elections. The campaign was vigorous and took place in an unrestricted atmosphere. A broad range of media provided voters with extensive information about parties and their activities. Public broadcasters generally provided balanced coverage of major parties.

The election law provides safeguards that promote democratic election practices, ensure transparency and protect the secrecy of the vote. However, concerns have been raised regarding the law allowing parties to choose, after the elections, which candidates take a seat in the parliament, disregarding the order on the candidate's list.

Election day was calm and orderly, with observers assessing the vote and the count positively. Some procedural irregularities were noted, such as low and flimsy voting screens which did not always ensure the secrecy of the vote, late opening of polling stations and procedures not fully observed during the count.

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