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Observation of the early parliamentary elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (5 June 2011)

Election observation report
Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau
Rapporteur: Mr Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Monaco, Group of the European People's Party

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1. Introduction

1. In response to the invitation from the State Electoral Commission of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" of 19 April 2011, the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly decided to set up a 20-member ad hoc committee, charged with observing the early parliamentary elections to be held on 5 June 2011. The Bureau also authorised a pre-election mission made up of five members who are also members of the ad hoc committee, one from each political group. The President of the Parliamentary Assembly appointed me Chairperson of this 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"). Pursuant to Article 15 of this 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 an adviser.

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

– Mr Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Head of delegation

– Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)
  - Jean-Charles GARDETTO*, Monaco
  - Karin STRENZ, Germany
  - Mustafa ÜNAL, Turkey
– Socialist Group (SOC)
  - Lennart AXELSSON, Sweden
  - Joe BENTON, United Kingdom
  - Andreas GROSS, Switzerland
  - Virág KAUFER*, Hungary
  - Gisela WURM, Austria
– European Democrat Group (EDG)
  - Ganira PASHAYEVA, Azerbaijan
– Alliance of Democrats and Liberals for Europe (ALDE)
  - Bernard MARQUET*, Monaco
  - Ljubo GERMIČ, Slovenia
– Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)
  - Pernille FRAHM, Denmark
– Substitute:
  - Jaakko LAAKSO*, Finland
– Venice Commission
  - Owen MASTERS, Expert of the Venice Commission
– Secretariat
  - Chemavon CHAHBAZIAN, Deputy to the Head of Secretariat, Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Unit
  - Franck DAESCHLER, Principal Administrative Assistant, Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Unit

* pre-election mission on 17-18 May 2011

4. The ad hoc committee worked as part of an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), alongside the election observation mission (EOM) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE-PA) and the EOM of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

5. The ad hoc committee was in Skopje from 3 to 6 June 2011, and held meetings with, *inter alia*, the leaders of the main political parties, the Chairperson of the State Election Commission (SEC), the Head of the EOM of the OSCE/ODIHR and his staff, as well as representatives of civil society and the media. The programme of the ad hoc committee's meetings is in Appendix 1.

6. On polling day, the ad hoc committee was split into eight teams, which observed the elections in and around Skopje and went to Veles, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Strumnica and Ohrid.

7. The IEOM concluded that "the early parliamentary elections were competitive, transparent and well administered throughout the country, but certain aspects such as the blurring of the line between state and party require further attention". The press release issued after the elections is in Appendix 2.

2. Political background to the early parliamentary elections

8. Early parliamentary elections have been called in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" for the second time in a row. The Assembly's ad hoc committee, having listened to the views of their various interlocutors on the reasons for the political crisis and the need to dissolve parliament and call early elections, drew up the following chronology of events:

– On 25 November 2010, representatives of the State Revenue Office, accompanied by the police, raided the headquarters of the television company A1 TV and three daily newspapers, *Vreme*, *Spic* and *Koha e Re*, to investigate alleged cases of tax evasion by those media. Following investigations, these companies' bank accounts were frozen under a court order.

– The opposition stated that these investigations were politically motivated because the same media had apparently in the recent past not been prosecuted for tax evasion because they had praised the government.

– In December 2010, the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), organised a major demonstration in Skopje calling for an end to the action against those media and for the release of the people arrested in connection with the investigations, including Velijia Ramkovski, a rich businessman and owner of the television channel A1 TV.

– For the opposition, it was a case that involved freedom of expression, while for the authorities it was a criminal matter.

– On 28 January 2011, the SDSM decided to leave the parliament, boycott its proceedings and call for early elections. The other opposition parties followed suit, including the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), which had been boycotting the parliament since 2009.

– Negotiations between the parties of the VMRO-DPNME coalition government and the opposition led by the SDSM on the possibility of the latter returning to the parliament failed and on 15 April 2011 the parliament voted to dissolve itself and called early elections for 5 June 2011.

9. In the meantime – and in spite of the opposition's boycott of the parliament – the government coalition had passed amendments to the Electoral Code on 5 April 2011, with the aim of implementing the recommendations of the Venice Commission and the ODIHR contained in the last reports on the observation of the presidential and local elections of 22 March and 5 April 2009. Given the very short time available, the Venice Commission was unable to adopt its opinion on the recent amendments to the Electoral Code. However, according to the ODIHR representatives in Skopje, the amended Electoral Code meets most of the recommendations and, if correctly implemented, will guarantee a sound legal basis for the holding of democratic elections.

10. The opinions of the political parties on the causes of the dissolution of the parliament and the organisation of early elections were diametrically opposed to one another. As far as the leaders of the government coalition parties were concerned, the opposition's blocking of the parliament's proceedings had paralysed its legislative work, thus preventing the adoption of important reforms to solve urgent social-economic problems, including in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration, and this situation was generally harmful to the country's international image.

11. According to the leaders of the opposition parties, the government majority voted for the dissolution of the parliament to avoid a likely electoral defeat in 2012 given its loss of public popularity owing to the crisis surrounding the television channel A1 TV and the media in general. Moreover, some interlocutors emphasised that the main concerns of the country's citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin, were the ineffectiveness of the fight against corruption and organised crime, the economic situation and unemployment.

3. Legal framework

12. The legal framework for the elections is provided by the Electoral Code, which came into force in 2006 and was amended in 2008 and on 5 April 2011. The recent amendments were adopted by the parliament by a small majority, in the opposition's absence, and only 68 out of the 120 members of parliament took part in the vote. The Electoral Code was thus amended two months before polling day, contrary to the spirit of Article 65 of the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters concerning the stability of the electoral law (II.2.*b*, paragraph 65).

13. For the early parliamentary elections of 5 June 2011, 123 seats were to be filled, including 120 by a system of constituency-based proportional representation (six constituencies with 20 seats each). For the first time, three other members of parliament were to be elected by citizens living abroad using the first-past-the-post system: one for the American continent, one for Europe and Africa, and one for Asia and Australia.

14. According to the country's authorities, the preparations to amend the Electoral Code and the various consultations were a long process that they had begun a year earlier. The amendments adopted had reduced the period for preparing the election campaign, thus leaving the SEC little time to organise the voting outside the country or organise training to familiarise polling station staff with the amended texts.

15. During a visit to Skopje on 17-18 May 2011, the pre-election mission pointed out that it was not enough only to amend the electoral legislation. The amendments to the electoral legislation should be supported by the firm intention of the principal political players to implement it and, consequently, create a climate of confidence in the entire electoral process. Nonetheless, according to the mission, the amended Electoral Code, if properly implemented, could guarantee a sound legal framework for holding democratic elections.

4. Election administration

16. The country has a three-tier election administration headed by the SEC, with 84 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and an Election Board for each of the 2 976 polling stations. For the first time, 36 polling stations were opened outside the country in diplomatic and consular missions.

17. The members of the SEC are appointed by the parliament. The chair and two members are provided by the opposition and the vice-chair and three other members of the majority. The SEC's former chair resigned on 23 February 2011 and, on the proposal of the opposition SDSM party, a new chair was appointed by the parliament on 12 April 2011. The Assembly's ad hoc committee welcomed the fact that the SEC had been able to function during the election campaign without interruption despite the recent change of chair.

18. Certain opposition representatives told the ad hoc committee about the politicisation of the SEC's decisions. The committee warned against the danger of politicising the SEC's work and underlined the importance of impartiality and a non-partisan approach to that work. The SEC generally worked in a transparent and efficient manner and succeeded in meeting nearly all the deadlines.

19. The members of the MECs were chosen from among state officials working at various levels of public administration. The composition of the Election Boards is mixed (politicians and professionals). One member is appointed by the opposition parties and one by the majority, and three others are chosen from among the state officials. This mixed composition of the Election Boards has also helped to increase confidence in the operation of the electoral administration.

20. Ten days before polling day, the SEC ran a campaign in the national media that focused on voter mobilisation, explained voting procedures and warned against election fraud.

5. Electoral rolls and candidate registration

21. In May 2010, responsibility for drawing up the electoral rolls was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the SEC, which has to update the voter lists on the basis of the information provided by the local authorities and in close co-operation with the Ministries of Justice and the Interior. The aim of this amendment to the Electoral Code is to strengthen the independence of the electoral administration.

22. The ad hoc committee is of the opinion that the system for drawing up the electoral rolls is particularly complicated. The Assembly's pre-election mission did not receive any clear and convincing explanations concerning the very small difference between the number of inhabitants of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (approximately 2.1 million[1]) and the number of voters registered on the electoral rolls for the early parliamentary elections (1 821 122). About 80 000 voters registered on the electoral rolls with an asterisk against their name live abroad and are entitled to vote there. Of this number, only 7 258 are registered on the electoral rolls outside the country to elect the three diaspora MPs: 4 653 voters in Europe and Africa, 1 832 in America and 773 in Asia and Australia.

1. According to the 2002 population census data.

23. The ad hoc committee expressed its concern about the accuracy of the electoral rolls, which in general terms remains a recurrent problem that has been identified since 1994 for all the elections observed in the country by the Parliamentary Assembly. On its pre-election mission to Skopje on 17-18 May 2011, the pre-election delegation was informed about the town of Kičevo, where, according to the opposition, about 50% of the population live outside the country and are still on the electoral rolls and where the turnout could exceed 95%.

24. While acknowledging the work done by the country's authorities to improve the quality of the electoral rolls, the ad hoc committee urged the SEC, the Ministry of Justice and the other authorities concerned to continue their efforts to improve the situation and take all appropriate steps to guarantee the accuracy of the electoral rolls, which is key to strengthening voter confidence in the entire election process.

25. The electorate was invited to consult and rectify the electoral rolls between 25 April and 4 May. Despite the awareness campaign accompanying this initiative, only 1 094 changes were made to the list.

26. For the early parliamentary elections of 5 June 2011, 16 political parties and two broad coalitions were registered by the SEC. The governing party VMRO-DPNME (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) formed a 22-party coalition and the opposition Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) a 15-party coalition. The two coalitions also included representatives of ethnic parties. The two main Albanian parties, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) participated separately in the elections.

27. The Electoral Code provides that there must be one woman for every three names on the lists of candidates, and the political parties complied with this rule: of the 1 679 candidates, 566 were women, which represents a total of 33.7%.

6. The election campaign and the media environment

28. The election campaign began on 16 May. A pre-election delegation travelled to Skopje on 17 and 18 May 2011 to assess the state of the preparations and the political climate in the run-up to polling day. During its visit to Skopje, the pre-election mission met the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, in his capacity as head of the VMRO-DPMNE coalition government, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Justice, the leaders of the main political parties competing in the elections, the Chair of the SEC, the President of the Broadcasting Council, the delegation of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" to the Parliamentary Assembly and representatives of the international community, civil society and the media.

29. At the end of its visit, the pre-election mission stated: "The delegation was informed about concerns on possible violence, cases of intimidation, especially in public administration, misuse of administrative resources and the need to ensure normal conditions for the free expression of the will of citizens. The delegation has been assured by the authorities of 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' that all measures will be taken to avoid election-related irregularities".

30. The issues of the political crisis, the dissolution of the parliament and the organisation of early elections were the focus of debate in the election campaign. The beginning of the campaign was peaceful, and the political parties did not compete against one another on the basis of ethnic affiliation, which has often been the case in the past. The start of the campaign was tenser between the Macedonian parties, with mutual accusations between the governmental coalition and the opposition that turned into tensions within the Macedonian electorate as polling day approached.

31. The parties, with some rare exceptions, mainly competed for votes in their own ethnic communities, which did not contribute to the creation of a society of citizens of different ethnic backgrounds. The community voting statistics highlight moreover the division along ethnic lines.

32. On 12 May 2011, on the initiative of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the international community present in Skopje, 36 political parties participating in the elections signed a Code of Conduct for Free and Fair Elections. On 13 May 2011, a joint statement on the early parliamentary elections was adopted by the heads of the European Union, OSCE and NATO missions and by the United States Embassy. The statement urged "all responsible political stakeholders to do their utmost to ensure that elections are in line with established international democratic standards".

33. The members of the ad hoc committee were informed by some candidates, NGOs and media representatives about cases of intimidation and pressure exerted by the authorities, as well as threats that public employees, especially at the local level, who supported the opposition would lose their jobs. According

to this information, the authorities even demanded that heads of various administrative departments present lists of 15-20 public officials who should vote for the government coalition. This problem is becoming more serious as, according to various estimates, over 30% of the workforce are unemployed and more than 100 000 people work in the country's public administration.

34. Given the scale of the problem and the concerns expressed by the NGOs and the media, the Prime Minister sent an open letter to the public administration on 19 May 2011, calling on officials to guarantee the freedom of the elections. The letter also referred to the "unfounded attacks by the political opponents" of the government. According to the ODIHR's long-term observers, the campaign was not devoid of cases of intimidation and the use of administrative resources, especially in rural areas.

35. During the campaign, the media broadcast a wide range of political opinions, thus enabling voters to make an informed assessment of the positions of the political parties. In "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", there are more than 150 television channels and radio stations, including three public television channels and three public radio stations, as well as 10 daily newspapers, seven in Macedonian and three in Albanian.

36. The Broadcasting Council monitored compliance with the law by the electronic media. It also drew up guidelines on the fairness of the media coverage of the election campaign. The Broadcasting Council revealed that a large number of media had failed to respect the principle of balanced media coverage. For example, according to the ODIHR media monitoring report for the period 16 May – 1 June 2011, 54% of the current affairs programmes of the public television channel MTV-1 devoted to the government's activities were positive and 45% were neutral. For the same period, 22% of the MTV-1 coverage of the government coalition VMRO-DPMNE was positive, 68% neutral and 10% negative. In the case of the MTV-1 coverage of the campaign of the opposition coalition SDSM for the same period, 64% of the information was negative, 33% neutral and 3% positive. The press covered a very wide range of opinions.

37. As regards the media coverage of the election campaign, the ad hoc committee was informed by various interlocutors about the phenomenon of a strong interconnection between politics and financial flows and, more generally, the importance of money in the election campaign. In this connection, the recent GRECO report on "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", published in March 2010, identified problems in applying the election campaign funding rules and a lack of transparency in this area.

38. The country's citizens are entitled to be informed honestly and objectively about ideas and programmes of the political parties concerned before giving their vote. Public television debates going beyond ethnic lines should have been organised. While welcoming the diversity of opinion and the freedom of the media, the ad hoc committee considers that the journalistic environment should be more dispassionate, tolerant and neutral and that the media should avoid becoming a means of propaganda serving the interests of the business world, the political parties or the government.

7. Polling day

39. Polling day was calm, and the members of the ad hoc committee noted that the atmosphere in the polling stations was peaceful. The following problems were observed:

– Cases of family voting. According to the ODIHR figures, this problem was noticed in 15% of polling stations, but the members of the ad hoc committee think it is hard to distinguish between family voting and helping illiterate people, most of whom are women in Albanian-speaking localities;

– There were also long queues at some polling stations;

– A large number of polling stations were small, which could cast doubt on compliance with the principle of secret ballots;

– Polling stations were not fitted out for voting by people with reduced mobility;

– There were cases of the use of mobile telephones in the polling stations, which is forbidden by the Electoral Code;

– There were cases in polling stations in rural localities where the staff failed to comply with the voting procedure. More training for these staff, especially in rural areas, would have been very useful.

40. The members of the ad hoc committee were pleased to note that the presiding officers in 47% of the polling stations were women and that women were also in the majority on the Election Boards. They regarded as positive signs the presence of observers from various political parties and domestic observers in virtually all the polling stations visited.

41. According to the preliminary results from the State Electoral Commission of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" announced on 6 June 2011, the turnout was 63.48%. The coalitions and political parties obtained the following number of seats: the VMRO-DPNME coalition – 56 (including 3 seats for the diaspora); the SDSM coalition – 42; the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) – 15, the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) – 8; and the National Democratic Party (NDP) – 2.

42. On 6 June 2011, the country's authorities arrested Mr Ljube Boskovski, the President of the United for Macedonia Party. The former Minister of the Interior is accused of corruption and carrying a firearm at the time of his arrest. His party took part in the elections and obtained 1.52% of the votes. On 6 June, a 22-year-old man was beaten to death by police during the VMRO-DPMNE victory celebrations, according to information disseminated by various media and NGOs. In this connection, the ad hoc committee calls on the country's authorities to do everything possible to shed light on the circumstances of this man's death and conduct a transparent investigation to establish the guilt of the person/persons responsible and bring them to justice.

8. Conclusions

43. The Parliamentary Assembly's ad hoc committee for the observation of the early parliamentary elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" concluded that "the early parliamentary elections were competitive, transparent and well-administered throughout the country, but certain aspects such as the blurring of the line between state and party require further attention". The ad hoc committee also noted that "[on] election day, voters were able to freely express their choice in a peaceful atmosphere, despite some irresponsible claims of irregularities by political parties. The voting and counting process was assessed as overwhelmingly positive, with no significant differences between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian areas".

44. The ad hoc committee established that, for the second time in a row, early parliamentary elections had been called in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", in order to resolve the political crisis facing the country since January 2011. It considers that the dissolution of the parliament and the calling of early elections are exceptional measures that should not normally replace the culture of a dialogue between different political forces to find the necessary compromises.

45. As far as the Electoral Code is concerned, the ad hoc committee regrets that the amendments to it were adopted by the parliament by a small majority on 5 April 2011, only two months before polling day, without obtaining the Venice Commission's opinion, and that the opposition parties boycotted the vote. The ad hoc committee believes it is not enough to amend the laws in force. The amendments to the electoral law should be supported by the firm intention of the principal political players to create a climate of confidence in the entire electoral process.

46. The ad hoc committee welcomes the fact that the SEC generally worked in a transparent and efficient manner and succeeded in meeting nearly all the deadlines. The SEC should avoid the danger of the politicisation of its mode of operation and remain impartial.

47. The ad hoc committee thinks the system for drawing up the electoral rolls is particularly complicated. The accuracy of the electoral rolls remains a recurrent problem that has been identified since 1994 for all the elections observed in the country by the Parliamentary Assembly. It calls on the authorities to continue their efforts in this area in order to improve the accuracy of these lists.

48. The ad hoc committee emphasises that cases of intimidation and the exertion of pressure continue to exist from one election to another and that, even worse, threats are made, especially at the local level, that public servants who support the opposition will lose their jobs. This is extremely worrying in a country where, according to various estimates, unemployment affects more than 30% of the workforce.

49. On polling day, the observers noted cases of family voting in 15% of the polling stations visited. This phenomenon is widespread in the rural Albanian-speaking areas, and family voting actually disguises the problem of illiterate people, most of them women whose husbands or other male family members try to influence the way they vote. Since it is chiefly the Albanian-speaking electorate which votes mainly for the principal Albanian parties, which was the case in the elections of 5 June, the ad hoc committee urges the leaders of these political parties to give a firm undertaking to allow women to participate freely in elections.

50. While welcoming the diversity of opinion and freedom of the media, the ad hoc committee expresses its concern with regard to the strong interconnection between politics and financial flows and, more generally, the importance of money in the election campaign. In this connection, the latest GRECO report on "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", published in March 2010, identified a problem in applying the election

campaign funding rules and a lack of transparency in this area. The ad hoc committee is convinced that the media should avoid becoming a means of propaganda serving the interests of the business world, the political parties or the government.

9. Recommendations

51. The ad hoc committee is of the opinion that “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” should reinforce its co-operation with the Assembly's Monitoring Committee in the context of the post-monitoring dialogue in order to respond to the following concerns associated with the elections:

– The need to strengthen the legal mechanisms for protecting the status of public officials, especially at the local level, in order to deal effectively with the fairly widespread cases of pressure and threats made during election campaigns that individuals would lose their jobs;

– The need to ensure the actual implementation of the legal provisions relating to the funding of the political parties’ election campaigns and the media, taking due account of the recommendations of the GRECO report on “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, published in March 2010;

– The need to promote a culture of dialogue between the different political forces, independently of ethnic lines, in a search for compromise in order to avoid the frequent boycotts of parliamentary proceedings.

52. The ad hoc committee calls on the authorities of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to ask the Venice Commission for an opinion on the Electoral Code, as revised on 5 April 2011, and to request the Venice Commission’s assistance in order to strengthen its internal legal and technical capabilities.

53. The ad hoc committee considers it necessary to prepare and implement electoral assistance programmes, targeted at the problems identified in this report.

Appendix 1 – Programme

Friday, 3 June 2011

09.30 – 11.00 Meeting of the Ad hoc Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly:
- Opening of the meeting by Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of the Delegation
- Briefing by Mr Robin Liddell, Minister Counsellor, Deputy to the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission in Skopje
- Briefing on the pre-electoral mission by Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of the Delegation
- Briefing by other members of the pre-electoral mission
- Recent developments in the field of election legislation, Mr Owen Masters, Expert, Venice Commission of the Council of Europe
- Practical and logistical arrangements, Secretariat

Joint briefing for the delegations of the Parliamentary Assembly and of the OSCE-PA

13.00 – 13.15 Opening by the heads of parliamentary delegations:
- Mr R. Battelli, Head of OSCE-PA delegation
- Mr J-C Gardetto, Head of the Parliamentary Assembly delegation

13.15 – 13.30 Briefing by Ambassador Ralf Breth, Head of OSCE Mission to Skopje

13.30 – 14.45 Briefing by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission in Skopje
- Introduction by Mr Julian Peel Yates, Head of OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission
- Polling procedures and forms: Mr S. Apostolov, Election Analyst and Mr H. Schmeets, Statistics Analyst
- Media landscape: Mr E. Tilpunov, Media Analyst
- Wrap up: Mr D. Bisson, Deputy Head of Mission

14.45 – 15.45 Panel with NGO Representatives:
- Mr D. Deralla, President, Civil Centre for Freedom
- Mr C. Henshaw, Senior Resident Director, NDI
- Mr D. Aleksov, Executive Director, MOST

16.00 – 17.00 Pre-deployment of some teams in the regions

Saturday, 4 June 2011

09.30 – 10.15 Electoral Administration:
- Mr B. Kondarko, President of the State Election Commission

10.15 – 11.35 Meetings with the representatives of political parties:
- Ms G. Jankuloska and Mr A. Milosevski, members of the Executive Board, and Mr V. Naumovski, VMRO-DPMNE
- Mr I. Ivanovski, Deputy Chief of election campaign, and Mr Z. Popov, International Secretary, SDSM

11.50 – 12.50 Meetings with the representatives of political parties:
- Mr I. Bocevski, Member of the Executive Board, LDP
- Mr I. Selmani, President, ND

12.50 – 13.50 Panel with Media Representatives:
- Mr M. Zeqiri, Editor-in-Chief, Alsat-M
- Mr B. Georgijevski, Assistant Editor-in-Chief, Dnevik
- Ms B. Sekulovska, Editor, A1 TV
- Ms I. Gelevska, Journalist, MTV1
- Mr Z. Stefanovski, President, Broadcasting Council

13.50 – 14.00	Closing remarks
14.00	Meeting with interpreters and drivers

Sunday, 5 June 2011

All day	Observation of the opening, voting, vote count and tabulation of results

Monday, 6 June 2011

08.00	Debriefing of the ad hoc committee
14.00	Press conference

Appendix 2 – Elections were competitive, transparent and well-administered, international observers in Skopje say

SKOPJE, 6 June 2011 – Yesterday's early parliamentary elections were competitive, transparent and well-administered throughout the country, but certain aspects such as the blurring of the line between state and party require further attention, the international observers concluded in Skopje today.

On election day, voters were able to freely express their choice in a peaceful atmosphere, despite some irresponsible claims of irregularities by political parties. The voting and counting process was assessed as overwhelmingly positive, with no significant differences between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian areas.

"These elections have laid a cornerstone for a stable, democratic future," said Roberto Battelli, Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission. "The reality of election day has proven many of the pre-election allegations wrong and put the country on track to have a climate free of paranoia that undermines voters' faith in the electoral process."

"The PACE delegation congratulates the citizens of this country on expressing their will through free elections. While welcoming the diversity of opinions and media freedom, the delegation believes the media environment should be more dispassionate, tolerant and neutral and that the media should avoid becoming a propaganda tool serving the interests of the business world, the political parties or the government," said Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

"Citizen voters and members of electoral commissions at all levels deserve praise for their contribution to an overall peaceful, orderly and well managed electoral process," said Julian Peel Yates, Head of the long-term election observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ ODIHR).

The observers noted that fundamental freedoms were respected and candidates were able to campaign freely. The general tenor of the campaign was peaceful and low-key throughout the country.

Allegations of voter intimidation lacked sufficient substantiation, but get-out-the-vote campaigns, in particular those of the governing party, often did not adequately separate party from state activities. The observers also noted instances of misuse of administrative resources and assessed as credible allegations of pressure on civil servants to support the ruling coalition.

A wide range of media provided diverse and extensive coverage of the campaign, enabling voters to make an informed choice. However, the majority of broadcasters followed partisan editorial policies and lacked critical analysis. Contrary to its legal obligations, public television significantly favoured the governing parties.

The observers highlighted the positive co-operation with the authorities at all levels throughout the process.