

# **NORTH MACEDONIA**

**Election Observation Mission 2024  
Final Report**

# Foreword

Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy is a Danish non-profit, non-governmental, youth-led organisation dedicated to upholding democratic values, whilst promoting dialogue, civic participation, and the defence of civil liberties and equality. This commitment is realised through a combination of domestic initiatives, international partnership projects, and election observation missions (EOM). Over the past 20 years, Silba has conducted more than 55 EOMs in over 20 countries.

**In the 2024 Macedonian parliamentary election and the second round of the Presidential election, Silba deployed 17 Short Term Observers (STOs) to North Macedonia from the 4th of May to the 10th of May.** The in-country team was led by an international group consisting of Head of Mission Kerwin Kouw (Dutch); financial coordinator Henrik Koch (Danish); logistics coordinator Kathleen Toth (Canadian), and press coordinators Daniela Lange Andersen (Danish) and Stijn van der Veen (Dutch). The in-country team consisted of 17 observers, 9 of whom were male and 8 of whom were female, and was made up of 7 nationalities including Danish, Dutch, Norwegian, Irish, Swiss, Italian, Spanish, and Belgian.

The election observation mission (EOM) encountered a few challenges with the authorities, as well as a mix of positive and concerning aspects during the observation of the electoral process. Overall, while the electoral process was conducted in a professional and orderly manner, some issues with polling stations, polling station officials (PSOs) and the behaviour of partisan observers raised significant concerns. Some of the main issues touch on inaccessible polling stations for voters with disabilities, PSOs not wearing proper identification and being absent, and partisan observers disrupting the voting and counting process.

**This report serves as a comprehensive record of the observations and concerns related to the 2024 Macedonian elections. On behalf of the Silba team, we wish to convey our heartfelt appreciation to all partners and stakeholders for their support and contributions to the broader discourse on democratic processes and standards during the deployment.**

# Table of Contents

<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About North Macedonia</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Parties and Coalitions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Electoral Law</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Key Developments</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Silba's EOM Methodology</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Election Observation Findings</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Election Results</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>29</b>

# Key Findings

## **Opening procedures**

- The opening procedures were not always followed, but were relatively well administered.

## **Voting and Electoral Administration**

- Most polling stations followed electoral administration and voting procedures. Issues that arose, such as problems with the biometric technology used for voter identification at the polling stations, were resolved efficiently and according to procedures.
- Irregularities were reported, including lacking identification badges of polling station officials, and interference of partisan observers in both the voting and counting processes.
- A substantial number of polling stations were inaccessible for voters with disabilities.
- The layout of some polling stations did not adequately secure the secrecy of the vote.
- Another issue pertains to unauthorised identification of voters by partisan observers at polling stations and unidentified persons outside polling stations.

## **Counting Procedures**

- The closing and counting procedures were quiet and quick with procedures generally being followed by around half of polling stations.
- Issues with securing unused ballots, unsecured ballots, and improper ballot separation undermined transparency.
- Some disputes about what could make a ballot invalid were not resolved in a satisfactory manner.
- There were no significant indications of false reporting or ballot box stuffing.

## **Accreditation and Observer Access**

- Observers were welcomed at polling stations, and their task was largely understood by polling station officials.

# About North Macedonia

North Macedonia is a country in Southeast Europe, with a population of approximately 2 million people. The capital and largest city of North Macedonia is Skopje. The official national language is Macedonian, and Albanian is recognised as co-official in areas where 30% or more of the population are of Albanian ethnicity. The history of the area that we now know as North Macedonia can be characterised by partitions, revolutions and intense political transformations. The legacy of historical events, including the rise of Alexander the Great, the struggle for independence under the Ottoman Empire, and their period as part of Yugoslavia, all continue to influence contemporary Macedonian politics and society.

Geographically, the country shares its borders with several neighbouring countries, including Greece, Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, and Bulgaria. North Macedonia is predominantly an Eastern Orthodox country, with most of its population adhering to the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith. There is also a substantial percentage of the population adhering to Islam.

**North Macedonia operates as a presidential parliamentary republic, with a President of the Republic and a Prime Minister.**

The primary decision-making power resides in the National Assembly, also called Sobranie, which consists of 120 to 123 seats of elected representatives. Members of the Assembly are elected by a system of closed-list proportional representation for a four-year term.

The unicameral assembly also elects the Prime Minister, who serves at the assembly's pleasure. The Prime Minister holds the most executive power as the head of government.

The President is elected for a five-year term through a direct popular vote, and may hold office for a maximum of two terms. While the Presidential role is more of a ceremonial character, the President also holds certain positions and powers: the President is the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of North Macedonia, is the President of the Security Council, and is able to send proposed laws back to the Assembly for them to be reconsidered.

At the time of publication of this report, the President is Stevo Pendarovski from the social democratic party SDSM, and the Prime Minister is Talat Xhaferi from the Albanian-minority party DUI.

The political landscape in North Macedonia has been marked by tension and bitter compromises in recent years. The country became an official candidate for accession into the EU in 2005, but is yet to become a member state.

The initial reason for the 19-year-long waiting period was the Greek veto, which culminated in the controversial Prespa Agreement of 2018. The official changes that have been made as part of the Prespa Agreement, particularly the name change from 'Macedonia' (officially 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, shortened; FYROM) to 'North Macedonia', has given rise to resentment and heightened nationalist sentiments in the country. The aftermath of the 2024 elections suggests that the Prespa Agreement will be called into question and provoke tensions between North Macedonia and Greece.

In 2020, only two years after the Prespa agreement seemed to provide some guarantee of North Macedonia's European path, the country was met with a Bulgarian veto against with a Bulgarian veto against EU-accession based on claims of anti-Bulgarian sentiment against the Bulgarian minority in the country. To get past this veto, the French government made a proposal which was initially met with a substantial amount of criticism from both the politicians and citizens of North Macedonia. The Macedonian government, however, went through with the proposal despite protests against it. The Bulgarian demands have yet to be implemented in the Macedonian legislature, meaning that the Bulgarian veto currently is lifted on the condition that the demands will be implemented in the future.

Autocratic tendencies have also been noted in recent decades, particularly under former prime minister Nikola Gruevski (2006-2016) from the conservative VMRO-DPMNE party, who has been found guilty of money-laundering and is awaiting trial in two court cases relating to abuse of power and financial scheming (Balkan Insight 20/12). At the same time, corruption has long been and yet remains a central issue within Macedonian society and politics.

The 2024 elections in North Macedonia are arguably the most important elections for the country and its citizens, as the outcome will determine the road to EU-accession and integration, official relations with neighbouring countries, and tensions between ethnic groups in the country and region. With the issues mentioned above and the political goals at stake in these elections, the justification for election observation is clear.

# Parties and Coalitions

## Parties in 2024

The main parties participating in 2024 Parliamentary elections were:



### **SDSM**

**Social Democratic Union of Macedonia**

*Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија*

Founded in 1991, SDSM is one of the usual two major parties in North Macedonia. They represent center-left pro-European positions, and have been a governing party since 2017. The current president Stevo Pendarovski represents SDSM, and ran for re-election in this year's Presidential elections. The first round of the presidential elections showed very unsatisfactory results, and as a consequence, Pendarovski vowed to rethink the party's strategy. Their candidate for prime minister was previous PM Dimitar Kovachevski. They ran in a coalition, 'For a European Future', which is described further below.



**VMRO-ДПМНЕ**

### **VMRO-DPMNE**

**Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation -  
Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity**

*Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација -  
Демократска партија за македонско национално  
единство*

Founded in 1990, VMRO-DPMNE is the second of the two traditional major parties in North Macedonia, they represent right-wing and generally nationalist opinions. VMRO-DPMNE's presidential candidate is Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, who won both rounds of the presidential elections this year. Their candidate for prime minister is Hristijan Mickoski. In 2024, they ran in a coalition, Your Macedonia, which is described further below.



## **BDI/DUI**

### **Democratic Union for Integration**

*Демократска унија за интеграција*

*Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim (in Albanian)*

BDI (named DUI in English) is the largest ethnic Albanian political party in North Macedonia, as well as the third largest overall. North Macedonia's Prime Minister, Talat Xhaferi, who himself is ethnically Albanian, represents BDI. BDI's candidate for prime minister is Ali Ahmeti, its chairman. They ran in a coalition named European Front.



## **LEVICA**

### **The Left**

*Левица*

Levica's candidate for prime minister was Dimitar Apasiev. They are a left-wing socialist party that was founded in 2015 and held a small number of seats in the parliament ever since.



## **AS**

### **Alliance for the Albanians**

*Алијанса за Албанците, АА*

*Aleanca për Shqiptarët, ASh (in Albanian)*

AS is the second-biggest ethnic Albanian political party in North Macedonia. AS's candidate for prime minister was Bilal Kasami. AS ran in two coalitions, namely VLEN and European Front.



## **ZNAM**

### **For Our Macedonia**

*За наша Македонија, Знам*

Founded in 2023 by Maksim Dimitrievski, the mayor of Kumanovo. He broke from the SDSM, with the difference of a more nationalist sentiment than SDSM's course for EU-integration.



## Parliament's Pre-Election Composition

Following the 2020 Macedonian parliamentary election, Macedonia's legislative composition for the 10th term Assembly was established. The parties included in this overview have been selected on the basis of having candidates in the Presidential and Parliamentary elections of 2024. The distribution of seats in the Assembly was as follows:

Political Party	Number of Mandates
Social Democratic Union of Macedonia	46
VMRO-DPMNE	44
Democratic Union for Integration	15
Alliance of Albanians	12
Levica	2
Democratic Party of Albanians	1
ZNAM	0

## The Presidential Election 2019

The 2019 Presidential election was the first election held after the adoption of the 2018 Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia, by which the name of the country changed from 'Macedonia' to the current 'North Macedonia'. Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, at the time running as a candidate from the incumbent VMRO-DPMNE party, which has nationalist tendencies, promised to initiate a second referendum and restore the previous name if she won. Her competitor, Stevo Pendarovski of the pro-European and centrist SDSM party, supported the agreement and promised to implement the changes therein.

The election was also the first presidential race after North Macedonia's 2016 wiretapping scandal. As the scandal unfolded, incumbent VMRO-DPMNE president Gjorge Ivanov pardoned several high-ranking politicians, in a move he said would allow the country to "overcome the political crisis" that had resulted. Ivanov remained in power until the 2019 election.

SDSM's Pendarovski won the election, earning a plurality of votes in both the first and second rounds at the polls.

## Coalitions in 2024

North Macedonia has a multiparty system, and as a result smaller parties tend to run for elections as part of like-minded groups under the leadership of the most influential parties sharing similar tendencies and goals.

The coalition "For a European Future" was composed of SDSM and 13 other parties taking a pro-European, integrationist stance. Along with other democratic socialist and liberal voices, Turkish, Vlach, and Serb parties are also represented, along with a right-wing party that split from the VMRO-DPMNE in 2008.

Running under the slogan "Your Macedonia – change is in your hands," the centre-right to right-wing coalition Your Macedonia was led by the conservative nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party, with 21 other parties participating in the alliance. While not inherently eurosceptic, this coalition's stance is more aimed at giving less concessions to foreign states in the EU accession process. This is evident in the name of the coalition, as the use of "Macedonia" rather than "North Macedonia" is a stance against the name change that came with the Prespa Agreement of 2018 with Greece. The alliance also includes parties representing Bosniak, Roma, Serb, Vlach and Turkish interests, as well as a socialist party.

The coalition VLEN ("It's worth it") is made up of smaller Albanian minority parties, namely AS, Democratic Movement, Besa Movement, Alternativa, and Vetëvendosje ("Self-determination Movement").

# Electoral Law

North Macedonia's main electoral framework is composed of the 1991 Constitution (last updated in 2019), the Electoral Code (last updated in March and April 2024), the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, the 2008 Law on Political Parties, and the 2006 Law on Financing Political Parties (last updated in 2012). The State Election Commission (SEC) is the official body in charge of elections and referendums in the country. Most of North Macedonia's post-independence elections since 1991 have met international standards, but issues such as voter buying and intimidation have been prevalent (Freedom House, North Macedonia 2016).

A considerable change to the Electoral Code relates to the use of expired identification documents in voter registration. The need for this change has arisen as a consequence of the Macedonian authorities' inability to issue updated identification to all citizens in time for the elections, as identification documents with the former name of the country expired on February 12th 2024.

Another considerable change was made based on the recommendations of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in which independent parliamentary lists now need to gain signatures for at least one percent of the total number of registered voters in the constituency. Before the implementation of this change, a 1000-signature quota was in place across all electoral districts.

A few stipulations and laws proved relevant for the purposes of this report. Among these is paragraph four of article 93, which stipulates that if 20% of the population of a municipality speaks an official language that is not Macedonian, then ballots should also be printed in that official language. In reality this usually meant that certain municipalities also needed to provide voting material in Albanian.

Taking photographs inside polling stations is not tolerated in North Macedonia, meaning that this report does not include photographs of the inside of polling stations. Taking photographs outside polling stations is allowed.

# Key Developments

In the lead-up to the 2024 Parliamentary and Presidential elections, North Macedonia witnessed a number of significant developments. The Greek veto against North Macedonia's accession into the EU and NATO was resolved with the Prespa Agreement of 2018, which included a number of compromises relating to Macedonian cultural regional identity, most notably the name change of the country. This round of Parliamentary elections has been the first since the name change, with the distinction between the old and the new name having a central role in the election campaign. North Macedonia faced a Bulgarian veto against accession into the EU, on the grounds of lacking recognition of the Bulgarian minority in North Macedonia. International negotiations to resolve this veto have led to the so-called "French proposal."

**The requirements and reforms necessary for EU accession have arguably been the most central issues in the political landscape in North Macedonia in recent years, as they not only touch on themes of regional identity and foreign relations, but also reveal insecurities and shortcomings on the national level.**

## North Macedonia's EU-Accession Process

### The Greek Veto and the Prespa Agreement

North Macedonia (then Macedonia) officially became a candidate for accession to the EU in 2005, but the accession process has been complicated with North Macedonia having had to go through multiple reforms and compromises to qualify for official talks about accession. One of the primary issues has been with Greece, as described above, particularly regarding the right to the name 'Macedonia'.

Greece vetoed North Macedonia's candidacy to NATO in 2008 and to the EU in 2009. The issue was resolved in 2018 with the Prespa Agreement between the then-Prime Ministers of Greece and North Macedonia, Alexis Tsipras (Syriza) and Zoran Zaev (SDSM). As described above, a central part of the Prespa Agreement was the name change of the country from 'Macedonia' (officially 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,' shortened; FYROM) to the current 'North Macedonia' in the following year 2019. A consultation was held in the country with the objective of ratifying the Prespa, with voters being asked whether they supported EU and NATO membership by accepting the name change. Although this referendum failed due to low turnout, the SDSM-led government went ahead with the ratification through the Parliament, causing popular dissatisfaction. In fact, the name change has been met with a substantial amount of criticism from both the opposition, namely the conservative party VMRO-DPMNE, as well as from the ethnic Macedonian public.

The Prespa Agreement of 2018 was the second time that this country changed its constitution to meet Greek demands: In 1995, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia changed its flag, from the depiction of the Vergina Sun to the current flag, which depicts a sun with eight rays covering the whole surface. The symbol of the Vergina Sun has been claimed as a Greek symbol stemming from ancient Macedon.

The name change continues to be an issue of contention to this day, and has been a noteworthy theme in the campaigns in these elections, especially in the months leading up to E-day. One of the factors leading to this situation has been the name issue on identification documents. The government gave instructions to change the name Macedonia to North Macedonia by February 2024, but the administration's inability to meet the demand led to a situation of uncertainty about possible fines or sanctions after that date. The resentment people felt over the pressure to change their documents has been well documented by outlets like Balkan Insight. Long delays, together with the burden of financial costs of filing for new documents, led to frustration among a large part of the population with the poor management of their public institutions.

The future of the Prespa Agreement is therefore in a more tenuous state than before the latest elections.

## **The French Proposal**

In 2020 Bulgaria blocked North Macedonia's EU-accession talks over accusations of 'anti-Bulgarian ideology' within North Macedonia, relating to the Bulgarian minority in the country.

The strained relationship between Bulgaria and North Macedonia has roots in interpretation of how the Macedonian state came to be, as well as the validity of a separate Macedonian cultural identity. Despite being the first country to recognise North Macedonia's independence in 1991, there exists a narrative in Bulgaria entailing that the Macedonian language is a dialect of Bulgarian, and that the Macedonian state is artificial in that it only came into existence after World War II, as a regional identity in Yugoslavia. The experiences during the Second World War are also a great source of disagreement. Some Bulgarian narratives paint the Bulgarians as protective administrators of the Macedonian areas, while most Macedonian narratives view the World War II Bulgarians as occupiers and oppressors.

In an attempt to find a solution to the Bulgarian veto, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed what is known as the 'French Proposal' in June 2022. This proposal entailed a commitment from North Macedonia to constitutionally recognise the Bulgarian minority in the country, introduce measures to protect minority rights of Bulgarians in the country and introduce hate speech laws into the criminal code. The proposal was met with criticism from ethnic Macedonians, particularly as the proposal was thought to make too many concessions to the Bulgarian narrative regarding the validity of the Macedonian state and cultural identity. The dissatisfaction with the proposal led to protests in July 2022 in North Macedonia. The proposal was, however, accepted by the Assembly on the 16th of July 2022, and another step of EU-accession negotiations officially began on 19th of July 2022.

## Changes in Media

Media freedom in North Macedonia has faced a number of challenges since independence. Journalists and activists face intimidation. Some media outlets have unclear ownership structures, leading to questions about their political and financial ties. Finally, financial insecurity in the media industry results in more dependency on government actors.

Media in North Macedonia heavily rely on clientelism as a means of operation, meaning there are strong ties between media outlets and the government, in particular the ruling party. Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) reports that as a result of a small advertising pie, media outlets are forced to go to the state for funding. This issue is further accentuated by the fact that media outlets in North Macedonia are, as is the general trend internationally, experiencing a decline in users, as many users move toward social media and messaging apps to get information.

Media freedom was particularly pressured under former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (2006-2016). At the time of Gruevski's resignation in 2016, the state had become the biggest media advertiser in the country. The wiretapping scandal of 2015 brought to light how the government was exercising direct influence on editorial policies through conversations between high-level government functionaries and staff of several major TV-stations, including the public service provider MRT. At some of these outlets, the editorial teams have since been replaced, and one outlet (Kanal 5) has publicly apologised for the editorial policy followed at the time.

Public service outlets are dealing with an even bigger decrease of users, as users go to privately owned media outlets instead. This puts users at risk of political influence as the ownership of private media outlets is not always clear. In the cases with clear ownership, the founders/owners oftentimes have ties to other sectors such as hospitality, construction or oil and gas, as is the case with e.g. TV-broadcaster Telma which is owned by the oil company 'Makpetrol'. Furthermore, according to BIRN, founders/owners of privately owned media outlets, particularly those with ties to private companies, have long had ties to or been directly involved with politics.

The situation regarding the state of media and journalism in North Macedonia has very real consequences for coverage of elections, in that independent candidates, that being candidates who are not affiliated with a party or a coalition, struggle to gain the same amount of media coverage as their counterparts in established political parties.

## Corruption

Corruption has been a pervasive issue in North Macedonia since independence in 1991, and continues to be an issue up to this day. Although the representatives in the Assembly are largely able to write and implement policy, corruption does stand in the way of exercising the policymakers' powers fully.

Freedom House reports that there are credible allegations of corruption within the judiciary and law enforcement, with a prominent example being the case of former Special Prosecution Chief Katica Janeva, who was found guilty of misuse of office in 2020.

The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) in North Macedonia has been applauded by the European Commission (EC) for their work, however the EC also notes that the SCPC lacks human and financial resources to properly do the necessary work to fight corruption efficiently and consistently.

In September 2023 President Stevo Pendarovski signed a new law, which will reduce sentences for officials in criminal cases with the charges of misuse of office or criminal enterprise. This law has been heavily criticised by corruption-fighting NGOs as well as by the EC, with the arguments that this amendment will be counterproductive in the fight against corruption.

## **Changes in the Electoral Law**

As described in the section on electoral law in North Macedonia, an important change in North Macedonia's electoral code pertains to the recognition of expired identification documents in voter registration. With the name change of the country, identification documents given with the former name expired by February 12th this year, less than three months before the elections on the 8th of May.

The process of exchanging expired documents for updated ones has been met with widespread dissatisfaction, as the fee for procuring the updated documents falls on the citizens themselves. The authorities in charge of the exchange have also been met with criticism as the process as a whole has been slow and inefficient, causing long waiting times for citizens.

This process is an indication of state authorities' inability to efficiently execute practical changes in a satisfactory manner. At the same time, this indicates a government that does not necessarily form a consistent plan for changes that directly affect citizens in this manner. In a 2023 report, the EC noted that recommendations by OSCE's ODIHR have not yet been implemented. The EC has emphasised that a comprehensive review of electoral law is necessary to address existing inconsistencies.

# Silba's EOM Methodology

International observers play a crucial role in safeguarding the integrity and transparency of elections. Their presence is instrumental in ensuring that the electoral process is fair, free, and free from irregularities. Our observers help build public confidence in the electoral system by providing an impartial, third-party assessment of the acts of the Parliamentary and the second round of the Presidential elections.

Within Silba, we have developed a comprehensive election observation methodology that enables us to conduct our observations as international observers in a highly professional manner.

This methodology is based on the OSCE's comprehensive handbook on election observation (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2010) and leverages the Okutool App to collect real-time field observations from our observers. This methodological foundation, combined with the IT tool, ensures that our observers are well-prepared to assess elections thoroughly and efficiently. All of our observers have received certification beforehand for completing OSCE/ODIHR short election observation training, ensuring that they are well-prepared and equipped to carry out their roles effectively in upholding the highest standards of election observation.

In line with best practices in election observation, Silba covers all electoral procedures, from the opening of polling stations to the closing and vote counting. This approach provides a comprehensive and well-rounded assessment of the election day. It encompasses the evaluation of election officials' performance, the conditions at polling stations, the processing of voters, adherence to general electoral procedures, and oversight of the transmission of polling station results.

**Our observers strictly adhere to a code of conduct that underscores the importance of impartiality and non-interference in the electoral process. Silba firmly believes that upholding these methodologies is essential for promoting democratic values and transparency in electoral processes worldwide.**



For this EOM, Silba deployed a total of 17 STOs of mixed nationalities and gender composition. Eleven were deployed in Skopje. Six observers were deployed in groups of two to 3 different cities: Tetovo, Kumanovo and Štip. This was done to get a better representation of the voting procedure and varied polling station environments in smaller cities. The factor of cities with substantial ethnic minorities was considered regarding the areas of deployment. Within Skopje, the observers were deployed in 4 groups of two, and one group of three, who were spread across multiple districts to get a good coverage of the Capital.

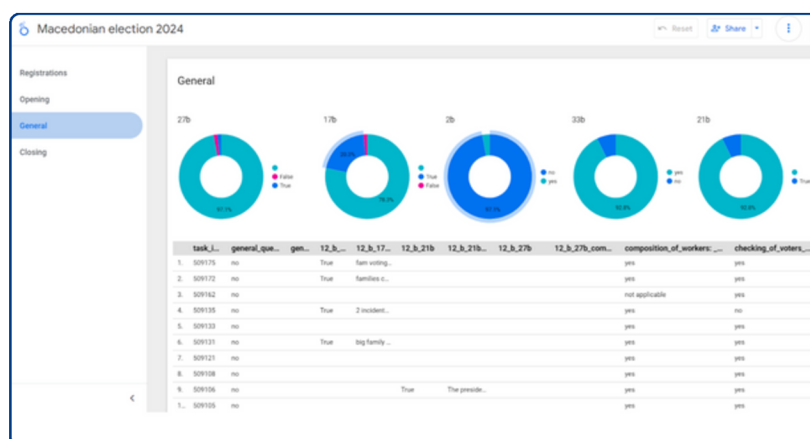


In order to prepare the observers for election day, we conducted interviews and meetings with four different stakeholders in two days. In addition to this, the observers received specific training on how to handle approaches by the media during election day, as well as instructions on how to use the reporting app Okutool.

## The Okutool App

In order to report their findings, the observers filled in forms on the app Okutool, provided by our partner Kloop. Through this app, the observers could send in their findings in real-time while they were at the polling stations, attach pictures and videos, send them off, get them verified by the core team, and fix any and all mistakes that were found in the forms. In addition, we had access to a dashboard, on which particular results from our forms were tallied, so we could report our findings live.

This also means that we managed to publish our preliminary findings at 16:00 the day after the elections, before any other EOM published theirs, including the OSCE. This methodology and app has proven to be extremely useful in reporting EOM findings. We look forward to building on this success, and hope to distribute our preliminary findings in the midst of the election news cycle, during future missions.



# Election Observation Findings

Our observations included 8 at the opening of polling stations, 69 general observations throughout the day, and 9 closing observations. A coordinator from the coordinator team also participated in the closing procedure, accounting for the additional closing team.

Photography was generally not allowed inside the polling stations. This limited what our observers could document in their reports to us. That also limits what we can show of indications and evidence in this report, in comparison to countries where discreet photography was generally tolerated.

## Opening Procedures

In general, the opening procedures went accordingly. At all the polling stations where our observers were present during the opening procedures, all the materials were present and all ballots as well as envelopes were intact. Furthermore, all the serial numbers of ballot box seals were entered correctly and all of Silba's observers were allowed to be present during the opening procedures. At the eight voting stations at which Silba observers were present, partisan observers of different parties were present, with other international observers present at two of these polling stations.

The opening procedures were executed effectively. In the opening observations, 100% of our observers witnessed the Polling Station Officials stamping the ballot papers during the preparation, following legal requirements. Furthermore, all observers confirmed that the ballot boxes were correctly sealed at the opening of the 8 polling stations.

Moreover, a significant majority of 87,5% of the polling stations opened on time at 7:00, with only 12,5% of the eight polling stations we observed experiencing voting delays. This demonstrates that the opening process was well-implemented, secure, and successful in upholding several fundamental democratic principles.

However, there were some issues. In half of the polling stations, our observers noted that the number of voters in the general voting list was not announced, and in three voting stations the number of ballots was not announced. Nonetheless, the correct number of voters and number of ballots were entered into the protocols at all the polling stations. Finally, minor instances of missing information notices of the candidates and parties for the parliamentary elections were reported.

# Voting

**Absent and unidentified staff at polling stations:** At 16% of observed polling stations across the country, there were issues with polling station staff being absent. This includes polling staff not showing up or leaving the polling station for short periods of time. Another country-wide problem was the identification of polling staff. 19% of the staff did not wear their identification cards correctly with identification either missing or not visible. This is a significant number, as this indicates that a large section of the population have voted in polling stations where there have been issues with absent staff or staff that weren't wearing proper identification.

**Unidentified persons near polling stations:** A significant issue was unidentified persons in cars outside the polling stations attempting to identify voters (16%). The aforementioned persons were seen counting the number of voters and keeping track of who had voted. Observers also reported that partisan observers inside polling stations were attempting to identify voters. This is a serious breach of voter confidence and can be interpreted as an indication of voter buying or coercion, which can throw doubt on the results as a whole. All in all, this is indicative of a significant number of voters having voted in a polling station that did not adhere to the standards for elections as identified by the Macedonian government.

**Unauthorised persons involved in the voting process:** At three polling stations there were reports of unauthorised persons involving themselves with the voting process. This was most strongly reported in Kumanovo with one report and Štip with two reports.

**Police near polling stations:** While there was a police presence near the polling stations, in most cases, the police presence fell within acceptable parameters. In 3% of the cases where police presence was reported, was the police presence inappropriate. We observed one instance of police entering the polling station uninvited and one instance of a police officer taking notes of the people who had voted. One case of inappropriate behaviour by an international observer was also reported with an OSCE observer taking pictures within the polling station.

**Insufficient accessibility of and layout inside of polling stations:** Several issues with the layout and availability of information were also reported. 19% of the polling stations observed were not accessible for people with disabilities. In 9% of the polling stations, the voting booths were placed too close to each other. Poor lighting was also identified as an issue. The availability of voting materials in minority languages was reported as missing in 18% of the polling stations where it was supposed to be present.

**Varied training of polling station officers:** The training of the polling station officers was conducted in wildly varying ways, with different moments, time periods and intensities of training. In one polling station an official was being trained during the conduct of the vote. However, the PSOs expressed that they were satisfied with the training received at all but one of the polling stations.

**Involvement of partisan observers:** Several instances of violation of the procedures were identified where partisan observers involved themselves with the voting process (4%) such as telling voters how to fold their ballots. There were also cases where partisan observers were unduly friendly with polling station staff (3%). On the other side of the spectrum, an instance of yelling between partisan observers and polling staff was also reported. There were also small technical issues with the biometric devices for voter identification. This led to voter exclusion once.

**Voter identification:** The voters' identification was consistently checked across all the polling stations. Even in cases where the biometric scanner did not operate appropriately, the polling station staff resolved the situation adequately and in line with the procedures. Across all polling stations, the ballots were stamped appropriately.

**Attitude towards international observers:** Observers encountered mixed reactions, with some PEC members being suspicious and others appreciating their presence. In general, the polling station staff was friendly to international observers and understood the tasks of the international observers. The voting was mostly peaceful with only reports from Kumanovo indicating unrest.

**Electoral Administration well-balanced, except for young people:** The gender balance was remarkably good. In all observed polling stations a total of 245 male officials were counted, compared to 226 female. This is a statistically insignificant difference and indicates the willingness to balance the officials well among gender-lines. However only 13,6% of these officials were young people younger than 35, and only 4,7% younger than 25.

**Issues with absent and unidentified PSOs:** A common issue met by our observers across 16% of observed polling stations was the issue of polling station staff being absent from their polling station. This includes staff showing up late or leaving the polling station for short periods of time.

## Closing and Counting Procedures

**Unused ballots not consistently destroyed:** During the closing ceremony of the elections, four observer teams reported that the unused ballots were secured while five reported that the ballots were destroyed. This inconsistency can point to either a lack of uniformity in polling station official training or a lack of clear definition in the procedures. Either way, this is a significant issue as unused ballots need to be prevented from being used to add extra votes after the ballot boxes are opened. Any lack of uniformity in the procedures is a significant concern as it can throw doubt on the results.

**Ballots not consistently invalidated and separated:** There was one report of suspicious voting being accepted and there were two reports of invalid votes separated insufficiently. Although the observers reported that this situation did not appear to favour one party or candidate, the inconsistent invalidation and separation of the invalid ballots pose a risk to trust in the count and the integrity of the vote.

**More frequent invalidation of Presidential Ballots:** In the Butel district in Skopje and in Kumanovo, our observers reported that there were two reports of a high number of invalid ballots cast for the presidential election while the number of invalid ballots for the parliamentary election was within regular bounds. This could indicate that voters were encouraged to receive the ballots for the presidential election, but not vote for either candidate.

**No significant indications of ballot box stuffing:** During the counting and the opening of the ballot boxes, no indication of ballot box stuffing was observed. In one case, in the Saraj district in Skopje, the observers were unable to observe the procedures clearly due to one polling station official blocking the view of the ballot box. In all other cases, the observers reported that no indications were found.

**Counting Procedures largely adhered to:** When the cast ballots were counted, the president of the polling station should show the ballots to everyone present. In one polling station, this was not correctly adhered to, resulting in decreased transparency in the counting and the aforementioned problem with verifying the lack of ballot box stuffing. The problems with incorrectly invalidated ballots and the assignment of positions too far to observe notwithstanding, this transparency is very much needed and necessary to ensure public trust in the results.

**No indications of false reporting:** During our observations, no indications of improper reporting of the results were observed. While in two cases observers found persons present to immediately make phone calls, they were unable to ascertain whether this was to report the results or for other means.. In addition, at two polling stations, the results were not publicly posted.

## Protocols

Thanks to having a copy of a polling station protocol, we see another instance of a station not opening on time, written as opening at 07:52, and still closing at 19:00 as no people were waiting to vote (PS2846, Centar). At the same place the total number of voters in the voters list was not obviously written into the protocol, but could perhaps be calculated via the number of unused ballots.







Seven of our observing teams returned to headquarters with physical copies of the polling station protocols for the parliamentary elections. For one team there were not enough available copies of the protocols, but they were allowed to take photographs and send them to us. From six of the closing stations we have copies of both elections, for two we only have from the parliamentary election.

Two of the protocols, one for each election, did not have the polling station IDs written, but from our observers we can deduce which they belong to, and the protocols match the results website.

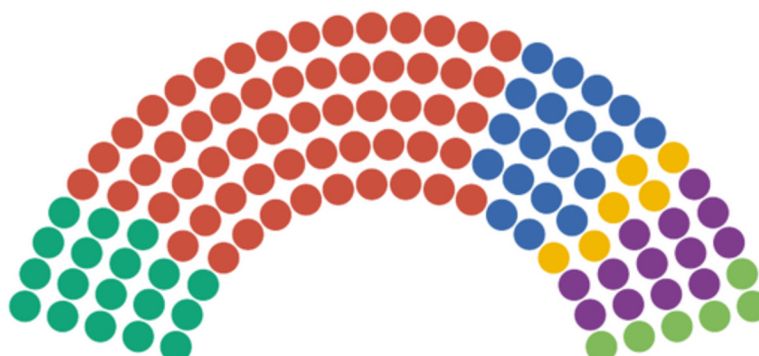
# Election Results

## Results for Sobranie (National Assembly)

Taken from <https://rezultati.sec.mk/en/parl/r> ,(14/05/2024) the results for Sobranie were as follows:

	Political Party / Coalition	Percentage of Votes	Number of Mandates
	VMRO-DPMNE	43,2 %	58
	SDSM	15,37 %	18
	European Front	13,66 %	19
	VLEN	10,64 %	13
	Levica	6,83 %	6
	ZNAM	5,60 %	6

These 6 parties and coalitions won seats in the national assembly. 11 other parties also were in the election, but all won less than 0,45% of the vote.



In a 120 mandate assembly, at least 60 mandates would be needed to have a majority. These results show that VMRO won a large plurality of the seats, however not enough for an absolute majority.

<b>Total number of voters in the voters list</b>	<b>1 815 350</b>
<b>Total number of voters who voted</b>	<b>1 006 432</b>
<b>Total number of valid ballots</b>	<b>978 953</b>
<b>Total number of invalid ballots</b>	<b>27 474</b>
<b>Turnout (National Assembly vote)</b>	<b>55,44%</b>

## Results for Second Round of the Presidential Election

The results for the second round of the Presidential election are as follows:

<b>Candidate (Party)</b>	<b>Percentage of votes</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>
<b>Stevo Pendarovski (SDSM)</b>	<b>29,25%</b>	<b>251 899</b>
<b>Gordana Siljanovska (VMRO)</b>	<b>65,14%</b>	<b>561 000</b>

<b>Total number of voters in the voters list</b>	<b>1 814 317</b>
<b>Total number of voters who voted</b>	<b>861 218</b>
<b>Total number of valid ballots</b>	<b>812 899</b>
<b>Total number of invalid ballots</b>	<b>48 289</b>
<b>Turnout (Presidential Election, 2nd round)</b>	<b>47,47%</b>

## Aftermath of the elections

Shortly after the election results were confirmed, discussions on the composition of a new government commenced. Party leader of VMRO-DPMNE Hristijan Mickoski led the party's talks with the VLEN coalition, who agreed on the fundamental pillars of a new government on the 11th of May (Euronews 11/5). These include European integration, economic development, the rule of law and the fight against crime and corruption, as reported by Euronews. There is a possibility that the newly founded party ZNAM will be a part of the new government coalition as well.

On the 22nd of May, re-voting for the second round of the Presidential election took place in the fifth and sixth districts, after irregularities were detected by the State Election Committee and accepted by the Administrative Court. KOHA reports that the irregularities mainly relate to the finding of more ballots in the ballot boxes. On the 28th of May ethnic Albanian Afrim Gashi from the party Alternativa was elected speaker of the Assembly, indicating that the new coalition government will soon be presented in its final form.

Balkan Insight reports that while the government coalition presently has the support of 78 of the Assembly's 123 members, Hristijan Mickoski is aiming for the support of two more members, thus reaching the holy number 80. This would give the government the two-thirds majority, which is necessary in order to change the constitution. It is, however, unclear where the two additional mandates would be found. Regarding the re-voting in the fifth and sixth districts, DUI has accused VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, and the VLEN coalition of 'arranged re-voting' in order to obtain two additional mandates in the Assembly (KOHA 22/5).

While European integration and accession into the EU are central issues as expressed by Hristijan Mickoski, North Macedonia's path towards EU membership presently stands at a crossroads.



With the VMRO-DPMNE's campaign having been centred around taking back the former name of the country, as well as the newly elected President Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova (also from VMRO-DPMNE) having continuously used the former name after having been elected, concerns have been raised among the Greek political circles, where the use of 'Macedonia' is interpreted as breaking the Prespa Agreement. This has caused Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to proclaim that continuous breaks of the Prespa Agreement will lead to a Greek blockade on North Macedonia's EU accession process.

Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova has also expressed that she is not in favour of including North Macedonia's Bulgarian minority in the Macedonian constitution, which has raised concerns in Bulgaria and renewed the risk of a Bulgarian veto against North Macedonia's EU accession.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Ahead of the elections, with the SDSM-lead government, North Macedonia was inching closer to EU-membership. With this process being of a rather turbulent character, the question of how the EU accession process will take shape in the future has unsurprisingly been the main topic in this year's Macedonian elections. The question of corruption in North Macedonia also still weighs heavy, especially in light of SDSM President Stevo Pendarovski signing off on a law reducing prison sentences for officials found guilty in abusing their official positions.

These developments have caused broad dissatisfaction within the Macedonian population, particularly the ethnic Macedonian population who have felt an erasure of Macedonian cultural identity in order to be approved for EU accession talks. The failure of the government to make the transition of official documents after the name change has further caused dissatisfaction with the government and the authorities.

The opposition coalition, led by VMRO-DPMNE, has utilised these sentiments in their election campaigns, centred around re-claiming Macedonian identity and pride. It looks like they will bring this identity-driven approach to their policy once the new government is constituted

It is expected that a new government will be constituted before the end of June, with Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova as the new and the first female President of North Macedonia. How the new government exactly will balance the promises made in their election campaign with the demands set forth by Greece and Bulgaria regarding North Macedonia's EU accession is yet unclear, along with the question of how the new government will deal with the issue of corruption in the country, with the fight against corruption being one of the fundamental pillars of the new government.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings and the assessment of the electoral and political environment we recommend the following changes to improve the electoral process in future elections:

**Standardised training for polling station officials.** A standardised training of polling officials would help on many of the issues we found pertaining to absent polling staff, and the polling staff's understanding (and follow-through) of required procedures from the opening of polling stations to the counting of the votes.

**Improvement of the clarity of accreditation,** so that it will be clear who is authorised to be present at the polling station, and in which capacity. This would make the act of voting and the election as a whole more secure and trustworthy.

**Improvement of the secrecy of the vote.** This could be done by improving the layout of the polling stations, to make sure the booths are private. We suggest getting bigger booths that cannot be peeked into, not placing the booths in front of reflective surfaces such as windows, as well as planning the routes of voters in the polling station to not walk behind the open booths.

**Improving the accessibility of polling stations for disabled people.** Many of the polling stations we visited weren't accessible for disabled people - creating ramps or choosing locations that are accessible for disabled people would make it easier for disabled people to participate in Macedonian democracy.

# Bibliography

Freedom House: "North macedonia 2017": <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2017> (13/5-2024)

International Foundation for Electoral Systems: "ElectionGuide": <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/4322/> (13/5-2024)

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Media Ownership Monitor: "Clientelism as modus operandi": <https://north-macedonia.mom-gmr.org/en/findings/concentration/> (27/4-2024)

Jasmina Jakimova, BalkanInsight: "Waiting Game: Queues for New Personal Documents in North Macedonia": <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/12/21/waiting-game-north-macedonians-queue-for-new-personal-documents/> (16/5-2024)

Association of Journalists of Macedonia (2023). "Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress"  
<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/EN-Fact-Finding-PFM-Report-251023-web-1.pdf> (07/7-2024)

Nektaria Stamouli, Politico: "Ursula von der Leyen urges North Macedonia to back French proposal on EU membership": <https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-urge-macedonia-back-french-proposal-eu-membership/> (16/5-2024)

Freedom House: "North Macedonia 2024": <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2024> (16/5-2024)

European Commission: "Key Findings on the 2023 Report on North Macedonia": [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_23\\_5627](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_23_5627) (17/5-2024)

Vasko Magleshev & Sinisa Jakov Marusic, BalkanInsight: "North Macedonia's President Urged to Block Sudden Criminal Law Changes": <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/07/north-macedonias-president-urged-to-block-sudden-criminal-law-changes/> (17/5-2024)

Euronews Albania: "European Commission criticizes North Macedonia over Penal Code amendments": [Freedom House: "North macedonia 2017": https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2017](https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2017) (13/5-2024)

Sinisa Jakov Marusic & Maja Zivanovic, BalkanInsight: "Timeline: The Path to Macedonia's 'Name' Deal": <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/09/29/macedonia-name-deal-timeline-in-pictures-09-28-2018/> (17/5-2024)

Vasko Magleshov, BalkanInsight: "North Macedonia Court Confirms Ex-PM Gruevski's Sentence": <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/12/20/north-macedonia-court-confirms-ex-pm-gruevskis-sentence/#:~:text=Former%20PM%20Nikola%20Gruevski%20has,prison%20by%20the%20Appeals%20Court.> (17/5-2024)

Sinisa Jakov Marusic, BalkanInsight: "With Speakers Election Imminent North Macedonia Inches Closer to New Govt": <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/28/with-speakers-election-imminent-north-macedonia-inches-closer-to-new-govt/> (28/5-2024)

Ekathimerini: "Mitsotakis warns North Macedonia violating Prespa Agreement blocks EU path": <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1239013/mitsotakis-warns-north-macedonia-violating-prespa-agreement-blocks-eu-path/> (28/5-2024)

Sinisa Javkov Marusic, BalkanInsight: "Dangerous Drivers: North Macedonia's Leaders Chart Collision Course with Greece, Bulgaria": <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/17/dangerous-drivers-north-macedonias-leaders-chart-collision-course-with-greece-bulgaria/> (28/5-2024)

KOHA: "In North Macedonia, re-voting is held in seven polling stations": <https://www.koha.net/en/rajon/420428/ne-magedoni-te-veriut-rivotohet-ne-shtate-vendvotime> (28/5-2024)

# Acknowledgments

To all who have contributed to the making of this report, from the EOM coordinators, and observers, to the Silba Election Observation Missions department and Silba Communications department, a very dear thank you.

Our work is made possible by the many volunteers who share our vision of free and fair elections, and thus dedicate their time and skills to building the framework around our EOMs. A special tribute is reserved for the election observers, whose diligence and hard work is at the very core of our EOMs and is of course the foundation for this report.

We express our gratitude to the Kloop Media Foundation for providing us with the Okutool app that facilitated the collection of our observations on election day and for their invaluable technical support. We are extremely grateful for their assistance. Lastly, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to all our partners and stakeholders whose insights and support played a crucial role in making this mission a meaningful and enriching experience for all participants.

## Authors

Daniela Lange Andersen

Henrik Vejsgaard Koch

Kathleen Toth

Kerwin Kouw

Víctor Gratacós Chacón

Stijn Willem Wennemar van der Veen

# Silba Team

## Observers:

Alessia Gonfroid

Camilla Venturini

Christina Busk Ankersen

Cicilia Clare Wibroe

Frederik Loftager

Johan Gilbert Rasmussen

Johannes Cornelius "Jelle" Baartmans

John Bracken

Jonathan Victor Bastlund Woollhead

Laura Westerbjerg Dantoft

Lukas Grundtvig

Mael Cassinadri

Mai Solmer Poulsen

Oliver Enevoldsen

Patricia Sophia Salvisberg

Philip Michael Elgaard Brett

Runa Ripel

## Mission Coordinators:

Daniela Lange Andersen

Henrik Vejsgaard Koch

Kathleen Toth

Kerwin Kouw

Víctor Gratacós Chacón

Stijn Willem Wennemar van der Veen

# About Us

**Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy** is a Danish non-profit, non-governmental, youth-led organisation dedicated to upholding democratic values, fostering engagement, and dialogue, and defending civil liberties and equality through national engagement, international partnership projects, and election observation. Over the past 20 years, Silba has conducted over 55 election observation missions in over 20 countries.

Learn more by visiting *[silba.dk](http://silba.dk)*

## **Contact for inquiries about the mission:**

Head of Election Observation Missions, Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy  
V́ctor Gratacós Chacón  
*[eom@silba.dk](mailto:eom@silba.dk)*



