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# **Elections in North Macedonia**

## *2020 Parliamentary Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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*Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Macedonian elections authorities as of July 13, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

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## **When is Election Day?**

The Republic of North Macedonia will hold early parliamentary elections on July 15, 2020. Voting will start at 7:00 a.m. and continue until 9:00 p.m.

Voting will be also organized on July 13 for voters who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are quarantined at home or who have been in self-isolation with a decree from the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate.

On July 14 voting will be organized in prisons; for voters at home due to house arrest, disability or illness; in centers for internally displaced persons; and for voters in assisted living facilities.

## **How has planning for the elections shifted in response to COVID-19?**

The Parliament was dissolved on February 16, 2020, and the parliamentary elections were originally scheduled for April 12. On March 21 the government adopted Decree No. 44-24131/1, which paused all electoral processes and activities due to the COVID-19 outbreak. On June 15 the government adopted Decree No. 44-5638/1 to continue the process of organizing the elections, which were confirmed for July 15, 2020. Other government decrees related to health protocols were issued to regulate the election process and provide guidance on protective health measures. As such, various election activities were adjusted to follow the recommendations and protocols provided by the Ministry of Health, mainly focusing on protection of the election management bodies; voting on Election Day and by people in quarantine or self-isolation at home; the electoral campaign; and handling election material throughout the pre-election process.

## **Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?**

Citizens are voting for members of Parliament (MPs) on Election Day. Macedonians will elect 120 MPs for four-year terms. There are six electoral districts in North Macedonia, and each electoral district will elect 20 MPs. Parliament is elected through a closed-list proportional representation system. The seats in Parliament will be divided according to the D'Hondt method.<sup>1</sup>

Out-of-country voting will not be organized for these elections, as the required threshold of 6,540 registered voters was not met. Therefore, there will be no MPs elected by voters in the diaspora, when up to three MPs could have been elected through out-of-country voting.

## **What is the campaign timeline and expenditure and donation limits?**

The election campaign in North Macedonia is defined as a public presentation of candidates and their programs during the pre-election period before the respective elections.

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<sup>1</sup> The D'Hondt method is used to determine seat allocation in party-list proportional representation. The total number of votes cast for each party in the electoral district is divided iteratively, first by one, then by two, then by three, etc., until the maximum number calculated corresponds to the number of seats that need to be distributed.

The election campaign starts 20 days before Election Day both in the first and the potential second round of elections and ends 24 hours before Election Day. No campaigning is allowed on the day of the elections.

For these parliamentary elections, the campaign began on June 24, 2020, and ended on July 12, while July 13 and 14 are designated “days of silence,” i.e., free of campaigning. The political parties signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections. After signing the code, the political parties also agreed to follow and respect all COVID-19 safety measures at all stages of the election process, including during the campaign.

Individuals can donate up to 3,000 euros (approximately USD 3,390) to election campaigns, and legal entities can donate up to 30,000 euros (approximately USD 33,897). Campaign expenditures from the state budget cannot exceed 2 euros per registered voter.

### **Who is eligible to run as a candidate?**

Every citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia may run for Parliament if he or she is at least 18 years old and has legal capacity.

Citizens who have been sentenced to more than six months of prison and have not started serving the sentence and those in prison for committing a criminal offense cannot run for Parliament.

### **Who can submit candidate lists and how many lists were submitted and approved?**

Registered political parties, individually or in coalitions, and groups of citizens can submit lists of candidates for Parliament.

The deadline for submitting the lists for the parliamentary elections was March 12, 2020. The State Election Commission received and approved a total of 15 candidate lists with 1,560 candidates.

### **Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate lists?**

There are no reserved seats for women. However, there is a quota requirement for the less-represented gender on candidate lists in North Macedonia. The quota requires that at least 40 percent of the candidate list be comprised of the less-represented gender and has a predetermined placement rule for candidates. The candidate lists for the 2020 parliamentary elections are gender-inclusive and in line with legal requirements and the 40 percent quota. Approximately one-fourth of the candidates lists have women at the top of the lists.

### **Who is eligible to vote and how many registered voters are there?**

All citizens who are at least 18 years old on Election Day, including all citizens who are temporarily employed or residing abroad, have the right to vote, except for those who do not have legal capacity

based on a court decision. All citizens who are at least 18 years old, reside in North Macedonia and possess a valid ID card or passport will be included in the voter register.

Registration for in-country voting is passive. The State Election Commission compiles voter lists based on data from the Ministry of Interior. Voters were able to inspect the lists from February 26-March 11. On July 4, the SEC concluded and closed the voter list with all the changes from the public inspection and additional data provided by the relevant institutions. A total of 1,814,263 voters are registered for the 2020 parliamentary elections.

### **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

Out-of-country voting is allowed for parliamentary elections, for which citizens must actively register. Based on the Electoral Code, out-of-country voting is organized if the number of registered out-of-country voters is greater than or equals the minimum number of votes won by one member of Parliament in the previous elections.

However, for the 2020 parliamentary elections, given that the State Election Commission approved 6,096 applications received through active registration and the minimum threshold was 6,540, out-of-country voting will not be organized for these elections. The citizens who registered for out-of-country voting are included in the voter lists for in-country voting. They can vote if they go to their polling station in North Macedonia to vote and present the required documentation.

### **Who can file a request to change voter list data during public inspection?**

Any citizen in North Macedonia can submit a request for entry, addition or deletion of data in the voter list during the public inspection. A request can be filed if a voter is not in the voter list; a voter is registered in the voter list but does not have the right to vote; a voter does not reside in the territory of the municipality; a voter is in the list but has died; or if a voter's name and address are entered incorrectly.

Citizens who are in pretrial detention or serving a prison sentence during the public inspection can also submit a request for entry, addition or deletion of data in the separate voter lists to the State Election Commission (SEC).

Political parties may also submit requests to the SEC for entering, adding or deleting data from the voter list after the public inspection.

Request for entry, addition or deletion of data must be submitted in writing to the SEC's regional unit or local office in the territory of residence or via email ([upisis@sec.mk](mailto:upisis@sec.mk)).

### **Will citizens with confirmed cases of COVID-19 and/or self-isolated be allowed to vote?**

Yes, citizens who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are quarantining at home and those who are self-isolated with a decree from the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate will be able to vote. The

polling will be conducted by Special Electoral Boards (SEBs), which will consist of health workers and political party representatives.

In order to vote, these voters had to register through an authorized representative in person or electronically, via email or through the [online application](#) by July 8, 2020. These citizens will vote on Monday, July 13, two days before the official Election Day.

Based on the health protocol, the SEBs will have personal protective equipment, including a gown for one-time use, face masks, gloves and disinfectant, and respect the required physical distance of one to 1.5 meters.

Voters must wear masks and should disinfect their hands both prior to and after voting. When showing their personal document for identification (ID or passport), the voter must briefly take off the mask while maintaining the recommended distance from the members of the SEB.

After visiting each household, the members of the SEB must change their personal protective equipment.

## **What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities?**

Assisted voting is allowed by law, and voters with disabilities can choose another person to help cast their ballots. Additionally, Electoral Boards are required to provide reasonable accommodations at polling stations for voters with disabilities. For example, to facilitate voting by persons who are blind or have low vision, the State Election Commission created a tactile ballot guide that will be available in polling stations across the country on Election Day. Additional guidelines for voting by people with disabilities are expected to be provided by the SEC, containing details regarding protective health measures.

## **What provisions are in place to promote the equal participation of women and minorities?**

Each gender should be represented by at least 30 percent of members in lower-level election management bodies (EMBs).<sup>2</sup> Ethnic communities that constitute more than 20 percent of the population in a municipality should be represented in lower-level EMBs. The law also calls for the provision of voting materials in any language spoken by more than 20 percent of a municipal population.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, voting materials on Election Day will be provided in the Macedonian language, as well as in Albanian in 26 municipalities and in other minority languages, such as Turkish in three municipalities, Serbian in one municipality and Roma in one municipality.

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<sup>2</sup> Electoral Code of the Republic of North Macedonia, Article 21

<sup>3</sup> Electoral Code of the Republic of North Macedonia, Articles 23

## **Where will voters cast their ballots?**

According to the Electoral Code, a polling station is the place where voting takes place. For these elections, citizens will be able to vote at about 3,480 polling stations in North Macedonia.

Once the polling stations have been determined, the lists will be displayed in the polling stations. The members of the Election Board will assemble at the polling station an hour before voting starts to prepare and to ensure that the election materials have not been tampered with. [Approved observers are permitted](#) to observe this process as well.

For the upcoming election, voting is scheduled to take place from 7:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m., with police and the Election Board arriving at 6:00 a.m.

## **What is the structure of the Parliament and government?**

The North Macedonian Parliament is made up of 120 to 123 deputies. The seats in Parliament are divided according to the D'Hondt method. A total of 120 members of Parliament (MPs) are elected from in-country districts while a maximum of three MPs are elected from the out-of-country single electoral districts.

The current government is made up of representatives nominated by the seven parties and coalitions represented in Parliament. The Parliament is composed of 35 MPs from the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia and 10 MPs from the Democratic Union for Integration, which formed a government after the 2016 parliamentary elections. The opposition consists of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity with 36 seats, the Democratic Party of Albanians with two seats, Alternativa with three seats, the Alliance of Albanians with three seats and the Movement BESA with two seats.

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers?**

The amendments to the Electoral Code from July 2018 established a State Election Commission (SEC) with a temporary mandate of six months. Additional amendments were made in November 2018 to extend the SEC's mandate for up to two years, which includes the administration of the 2020 parliamentary elections. The March 2020 government decree extended again the mandate up to six months after these elections.

The SEC is comprised of seven members, three of whom are women. The ruling majority and opposition political parties nominate the SEC members, which include a president from the opposition and a vice president from the ruling coalition. Lower-level commissions include 80 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) — and the Election Commission of the city of Skopje, with a mandate during local elections — and approximately 3,480 Electoral Boards (EBs) in North Macedonia and up to 53 EBs in diplomatic-consular offices.

MECs are comprised of five members and their deputies, selected randomly among public servants for a five-year term. EBs have a mandate of four years and are comprised of three public servants, two political appointees and their deputies. Each member of the MECs and EBs has a deputy. The SEC, MECs

and EBs are responsible for the entire administration of the electoral process, maintaining the voter list and voter registration, counting and tabulation of results, election dispute resolution, election security arrangements, election observation and other duties specified by the government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

SEC will organize voting in assisted living facilities, based on an active registration of the voters in those facilities. As such, for these elections, 409 voters will be able to vote in 17 assisted living facilities.

Also, with the newest changes to the Electoral Code in 2020, the MECs were tasked with protecting the right to vote. Specifically, any voter whose individual voting right has been violated at any stage of the electoral process may submit a complaint to the MEC.

Furthermore, for the 2020 parliamentary elections, the SEC also created additional Special EBs, comprised of health workers and political party representatives, responsible for voting by citizens who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are quarantined at home or are self-isolated with a decree by the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate.

## **What is the election management body doing to safeguard the elections and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

On Election Day, before the start of voting, every polling station will be cleaned and disinfected. Posters for both voter education and protection will be displayed at each polling station.

Voters are required to maintain a distance of 1.5 to 2 meters from one another during the entire process. Every voter must wear a mask or scarf on his or her face and disinfect his or her hands when entering and when exiting the polling station.

During the identification process, after providing their personal document for identification (ID or passport), voters must briefly take off their mask to identify themselves.

Polling officers are to maintain a distance of one to 1.5 meters from one another. All members of the Electoral Boards must wear a face mask and gloves. The mask should be changed every four hours and the gloves after restroom and lunch breaks.

Only as many as voters as there are voting booths are allowed inside the polling stations.

The EMBs also changed polling station locations that did not satisfy the minimum requirements for maintaining a safe distance between election administrators, voters and all others present at the polling stations.

## **What is the election management body doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and counter malign interference?**

The State Election Commission (SEC) allows all citizens to check their data in the voter register online, which also provides information about the accessibility of individual polling stations. In addition, the SEC allows out-of-country voters to register through an online application. Furthermore, the election results are entered by the Municipal Election Commissions as they are received from the Electoral Boards and are transmitted immediately to the SEC website. This process facilitates voters' access to the electoral process, increases transparency and improves the timelines of and public trust in the election results. Citizens can also use the online platform to file complaints related to the voter list and/or denial of their right to vote.

This year, for the first time, the SEC made registration of the candidate lists available online. The online registration of candidate lists made the overall process more efficient for the SEC and also contributed to increased transparency, review and analysis of the lists and candidates. The SEC works with a number of software developers and companies in North Macedonia, including the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' partners, to ensure robust, safe and effective use of election technology.

## **What are the rules governing the media?**

Media coverage of the electoral campaign is required to be neutral and impartial. It must also provide equality of opportunities in the public financing of candidates, paid political advertising, other forms of financial support and their overall spending for the electoral campaign.

The Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services is responsible for monitoring broadcasters' electoral representation.

During the election campaign, radio and television stations covering the elections must ensure their overall programs are fair, balanced and impartial.

Broadcasters that air programs in the Macedonian language cannot limit their coverage to candidates of Macedonian ethnicity, just as broadcasters that air programs in other ethnic languages cannot limit their coverage to candidates from those communities.

The Public Broadcasting Service and commercial broadcasters that air national programs should ensure their elections coverage is in a format that accommodates persons with sensory disabilities. Broadcasters are responsible for ensuring balanced coverage in all forms of electoral media representation, in line with their editorial policy, by means of two principles – equality and proportionality.

For parliamentary elections, broadcasters follow the principle of proportionality based on the number of confirmed lists of candidates for seats in Parliament.

## **Which media outlets can use public funds for paid political advertising?**

To qualify for the broadcasting and publication of paid political advertising, broadcasters and all print and online media must register with the State Election Commission. Registration must be completed within three days after the announcement of elections. To register, a media outlet should submit an application and a current balance sheet issued by the Central Registry of the Republic of Macedonia that is not older than 30 days. Media outlets that fail to register cannot use the national funding for paid political advertising. For the early parliamentary elections, the registry consists of 345 media outlets: 45 television stations, 53 radio broadcasters, 12 print outlets and 235 online outlets.

## **What are the principles and regulations for paid political advertising?**

Election regulations set limits on the total duration of paid political advertising for each hour of aired programming and limits on airtime. Based on a government decree, changes were made to the distribution of airtime.

During an election campaign, both in the first and second round of voting, broadcasters can air a total of 15 hours a day of paid political advertising, and none of the political parties can use more than three minutes for advertising per hour.

The two biggest ruling political parties may use a total of six minutes, with three minutes for each political party/coalition that has submitted a candidate list,<sup>4</sup> or three minutes for the coalition *Mozeme* (“We can”) and three minutes for the political party Democratic Union for Integration. The parties may use more than three minutes of advertising time per hour of paid political advertising, if the other political party agrees and cedes part of its allotted time.

If one of the biggest ruling or opposition political parties did not submit a list, the biggest ruling and/or opposition political party that did submit a list may not use more than three minutes for advertising per hour. From the six minutes available for the two biggest opposition parties, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity and the *Obnova* (“Renewal”) coalition, may use only three minutes as the only list submitter from the two opposition parties.

Paid political advertising must be properly and visibly marked as “paid political advertising” and clearly separated from other media content.

## **How is advertising space allocated?**

The Electoral Code sets rules on allocating the advertising space in print and online media. Additional adjustments were made through Decree No. 44-6210/1 initiated by the government.

Namely, one of the ruling political parties may use up to half of the space allocated for the two biggest ruling parties. Only upon agreement, one of the ruling parties may cede the space to the other. If one of

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<sup>4</sup> List submitters refers to registered political parties or coalitions of political parties registered at the State Election Commission, a group of voters and members of Parliament.

the ruling political parties has not submitted a candidate list, the ruling political party that has submitted a list may not use more than half of the space.

The same rules apply for the opposition parties. The space determined for the two biggest opposition parties will follow the same principle of distribution applied to the ruling parties.

## **Who will observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?**

The State Election Commission (SEC) is responsible for determining the procedure for election observation. International organizations, representatives of foreign countries and domestic and foreign organizations that were established at least one year prior to Election Day and whose statutes include the protection of human rights can observe Election Day administration and procedures.

Interested observers may apply for accreditation to the SEC no later than five days before Election Day on July 15, 2020. The SEC, upon approval, must issue observer authorizations within two days after receipt of the request. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has a seven-member core team of experts in North Macedonia.

## **Who is managing security on Election Day?**

The police will secure the polling stations continuously from 6:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m. Upon the closure of the polling station and during the counting of the votes, the police will secure the building where the polling station and the Election Board are located. The police will escort representatives of the Electoral Boards when transporting election materials during the handover to the respective Municipal Election Commissions.

## **How are votes counted and tabulated? Who manages counting and tabulation?**

After voting ends the Electoral Board (EB) must immediately start the procedure for counting the ballots and summing up the results at the polling stations. Prior to counting the votes, the EB members will count the number of voters who have voted and the number who provided their signature or fingerprint upon check-in. Subsequently, all unused ballots will be counted. Once completed, the ballot box is opened, and the individual counting of each ballot will commence. One EB member, selected by drawing lots, will open each ballot and hand it over to the EB president, who will then show each ballot to the rest of the EB members and observers. The EB will then decide if the ballot is valid before recording the vote. Once the EBs have completed counting and filled in the results protocols, they will give the results protocols to the corresponding Municipal Election Commission (MEC) as part of the process of handing over the election materials.

The MEC will then tabulate the results of the voting within five hours of receiving the ballots from the EBs. Once all MECs have completed the tabulation, the election materials, including the results protocols, will be given to the State Election Commission.

## **When will official results be announced?**

The Electoral Boards (EBs) will submit the protocols and all other voting materials to the corresponding Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) within five hours following the closure of polling stations. The results are entered electronically by the MECs as soon as they are received from each EB and immediately made available on the State Election Commission (SEC) website. The MECs shall submit the protocols and all other voting material to the SEC within five hours of receiving the materials from the EBs. Initial results will be announced by the 12-hour mark after the completion of voting, provided the SEC has received official protocols from the MECs. The SEC announces the final results immediately, or no later than 24 hours after the results become final.

## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

Any citizen whose individual voting right has been violated during the election process may submit a complaint to the State Election Commission (SEC) directly or through the Municipal Election Commission within 24 hours of Election Day. The SEC must reach a decision within four hours of receiving the complaint. Each submitter of a candidate list also has the right to submit a complaint to the SEC within 48 hours from the end of voting or after announcement of preliminary results about irregularities in the procedure for voting, tabulating and determining the results. The SEC must decide on the complaint within 48 hours from the receipt of a complaint. An appeal may be lodged to an Administrative Court against the decision of the SEC within 24 hours from the day of receiving the determination. The Administrative Court must make a decision within 60 hours following the receipt of the suit. After a public hearing is held, the Administrative Court is required to pronounce the decision. The court must publish the decision on its website within 24 hours of the announcement of the verdict. The published decisions must also include a list of how each judge voted.

## Resources

- [Electoral Code of North Macedonia](#) (English)
- [Guide for Ethical Media Coverage of Elections in North Macedonia](#) (English)
- [Annex to the Manual for Education](#) (Macedonian)