

**EUROPEAN DIALOGUE AND
DEMOCRACY ASSOCIATION (EDDA)
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**



**FINAL REPORT
NORTH MACEDONIA
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
24 APRIL 2024**

Introduction

From April 19th to April 25th, 2024, European Dialogue and Democracy Association (EDDA) arranged its first ever combined *Head of Mission Training x Election Observation Mission (EOM)* in Skopje, North Macedonia 2024. Within this new framework, the 9-person delegation underwent coordination-related training as preparation for the deployment of future EDDA EOMs, in addition to observing the first round of the Presidential Elections of the Republic of North Macedonia. The elections took place on April 24th, 2024. Hence, the size of the delegation and the scope of the EOM was more limited in comparison with former EOMs in favour of prioritising extensive out-of-country training for future EDDA election observation coordinators, in line with the organisation's new growth strategy. The Head of Mission training x Election Observation Mission was coordinated and executed by Elisa Parnefält Størksen and David Huseinovic Waade.

Head of Missions Training

On Saturday April 20th, members of the delegation completed a day of Head of Mission Training consisting of modules conducted by the mission's coordinators. The newfound strategy prioritising internal education was deduced from the newly elected board's vision relating to activity and membership growth. Besides educating and engaging participating members, the intention was to ensure that future EOMs will follow EDDA's organisational expectations and standards, while simultaneously increasing the quality of EDDA's election monitoring functions in line with the organisation's overarching goal of facilitating knowledge and interest in politics, democratic processes and civil society in Eastern Europe.

It is expected that such international projects, along with the recent establishment of the organisation's local branches in Bergen and Oslo, will facilitate activity and inspire engagement in members who do not hold official positions in EDDA's national Board.

During the Head of Mission training, members completed a range of modules covering *Coordinating an Election Observation Mission, External communication, Crisis management* and *EDDA Organisational culture*. The modules challenged the members to practise their problem-solving abilities through cases relating to upcoming elections, communicating EDDA's work and relevance, as well as more practical cases relating to ensuring observer-wellbeing and security. Additionally, participants were constantly included in discussions and conversations concerning the practical execution of EDDA's EOM to North Macedonia 2024, and were as such able to learn from the coordinators' handling of the EOM that they were participating in themselves. After the EOM, it is scheduled that participants will also complete modules relating to *Data handling, and Reporting of EOM findings*.

Election Observation Mission

The EDDA EOM in North Macedonia 2024 for the first round of Presidential elections, held on the 24th of April 2024, consisted of 9 short-term observers (STOs), whereof the majority of the participants had previous experience as observers from earlier EDDA EOMs. Per EDDA and OSCE/ODIHR guidelines, all STOs underwent training through the comprehensive OSCE/ODIHR E-learning course in advance of their participation. As usual during EDDA EOMs, STOs also participated in a range of meetings with election stakeholders and other relevant organisations prior to election day, in order to facilitate a more holistic understanding of the North Macedonian political context in which the elections were taking place.

We would like to note that observers were not accompanied by translators on election day due to difficulties relating to their recruitment. Hence, observers were somewhat limited in understanding all going-ons in and around the polling stations (PSs). However, as most polling station officials (PSOs) had a solid grasp of the English language and showed willingness to explain unexpected occurrences, this was not considered to be a particularly noteworthy problem affecting the observers' abilities to report from the polling stations.

Election Day

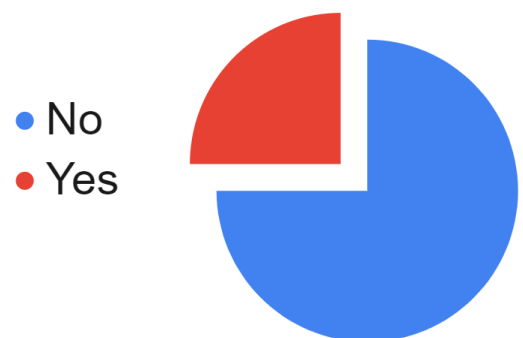
On election day, the STOs were divided into three observer pairs and one part time, three-person observation group consisting of two coordinators and one observer. In total, STOs spent a total of 20,5 hours observing voting procedures at 32 PSs across 6 municipalities.

Opening procedures

The opening procedures were deemed as satisfactory overall based on observations of the polling stations' opening processes. Three observer-teams rated the overall performance of the opening procedures as *good*, while one team rated the overall performance as *very good*. PSs received good scores on the basis of transparency of the voting process, necessary materials present, and women representation. During the opening procedures, all observers had a clear view of the opening procedures, and were not restricted in their observations in any way. In addition, all the observed polling stations for the opening procedures had a female chairperson.

Though all necessary materials were present during the opening of the polling stations, some discrepancies were observed in relation to the opening procedures. There were slight delays experienced in the opening of the polling stations due to technical issues with the equipment used to register the fingerprints of voters. Therefore, one polling station was reported to have opened on time, while two polling stations were noted to have opened at 07:02 and one polling station was observed to have opened at 07:06. However, as no voters were present at the observed PSs before these times, there were no observed delays in the administering of votes during the opening of the PSs. There were also reports of inconsistencies in regards to protocol registration procedures in two of the observed PSs. In two cases, PSOs did not announce and enter the number of registered voters in the general voting lists, and in one of the PS the number of available ballot papers, and serial numbers of ballot box seals were not entered into the protocol.

Did PS Open on time



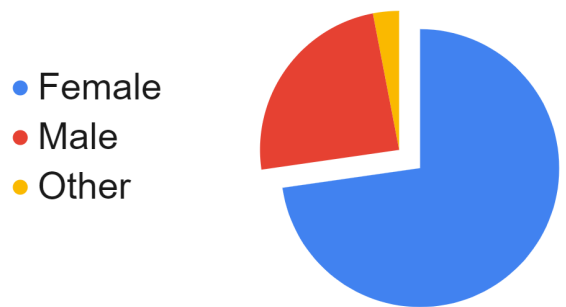
Local observers were reported to be present in all observed PSs. The observers represented political parties, with one exception for one observer that observed on behalf of a nonpartisan election observation organisation.

General Observations

General trends observed during the opening procedures were also apparent in the general observations throughout election day. Overall ratings were evenly split between *good*¹ and *very good*², implying that none of the observed polling stations were assessed to perform poorly. The conduct and the performance of the PSOs are also observed to be *good* or *very good* in all cases, with the exception of one singular polling station where the rating *bad* was given in relation to procedural consistencies. Female representation was also prominent during the general observations, with over 70 percent of the chairpersons in observed PSs being female. The observers' positive ratings were attributed to relatively few abnormalities, inconsistencies or mistakes observed throughout election day. Inconsistencies noted by EDDA observers include two instances of unauthorised persons at the polling station, three instances of inappropriate booths, screens or lighting that failed to ensure the secrecy of the vote, six instances of group or family voting, six instances of inadequately sealed ballot boxes, five instances of lack of necessary voting materials information, and six instances of interference with the work of PSOs and observers.

More general overarching themes were technical problems, accessibility and lack of materials in minority languages. Several polling stations retrospectively reported technical difficulties with the fingerprint equipment which caused delays in the opening of the PSs. Seven of the PSs observed during general observations on election day reported that they were not able to open on time due to this issue. Relating to physical accessibility of the polling stations, observers reported that approximately one third³ of observed PSs proved challenging to access for people with physical disabilities.

PSO Chairperson



Access to PS challenging for mobility impaired



¹ 48.5 percent

² 51.5 percent

³ 10

Closing Procedures

The closing and counting process was generally completed in a transparent and efficient manner across observed PSs. All observation teams were able to observe the entirety of the counting and closing procedures, and one team also escorted the chairperson with the ballot box to observe the handover-process at the Municipality of the City of Skopje. Based on departure times registered by the STOs, closing procedures in the PSs were on average completed in the time span of 1 hour and 32 minutes. Overall ratings of the closing procedures were evenly split between *good* and *very good*.

The closing procedures in the observed PSs were to a large extent followed. However, there were some noteworthy discrepancies. One STO team noted that there was a lack of clear and consistent use of identifying badges which made the role of individuals participating in the counting procedures difficult to identify for the observers. Party observers were also reported by EDDAs observers to have directly contributed during the counting process in two of the observed PS.

More generally, observers noted a wider lack of formality and neutrality displayed by individuals present in the PS during the counting procedures. This was exemplified through excessive phone use, including the immediate transfer of PS results from party observers to external actors after the initial counting of votes, as well as displays of clear party preferences of PSOs through public reactions to votes for the different parties. While the counting process was among the swiftest observed by EDDA since 2016, STOs noted that most participants during the counting were explicitly wanting to finish the process and leave as soon as possible. In one PS, this apparent “rush” to finish the counting process translated to procedural weaknesses, as the election board needed to reopen already sealed ballot boxes/security bags to complete the process appropriately, as some steps were initially forgotten.

General Conclusions

As a general concluding remark, the use of phones and the early communication of votes to external actors, and the relating level of professionalism, or lack thereof, displayed by some PSOs and local observers stained the observer's perception of the ceremoniousness of the electoral process, even if it seemingly did not affect the final results in the

Overall rating



observed PSs. Such occurrences became increasingly observable as the election day drew to a close, and proved particularly prominent during closing procedures.

Based on the STOs observations during the first round of the Presidential Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia, it is EDDAs assessment, based on its limited number of observations, that the procedures on election day were generally followed in a way in which can be described as transparent, free and fair. Consistent observations across polling stations on election day during opening, voting and closing procedures indicate that the transparency of the electoral processes was satisfactory, and that the polling station officials were trained in a satisfactory manner. All observed PS were given a rating of *good* and *very good* by the STOs, and any observed procedural inconsistencies were not deemed to be of sufficient scope to have jeopardised the legitimacy of the vote.