

State Commission for Voters' Lists has up to 15 days (12 October 1998) to release copies to the parties. This delay means that parties potentially may have only six days to review the lists before polling day.

The State Electoral Commission has issued voter identification cards to all registered voters. The identification cards do not have photographs attached to them. Although these identification cards should reduce the possibility of voter fraud, some of the opposition parties, VMRO-DPMNE, in particular, have raised concerns about the issuance of the cards. VMRO-DPMNE has claimed that more than 100,000 cards had not been distributed to voters and said that this opened the door for abuse. In some distribution offices, the voter identification cards are stored in large sacks. The time-consuming process to locate specific identification cards may discourage some voters from claiming them.⁶

E. Media Regulation

The basic provisions regarding media regulation of the election campaign are contained in Article 43 of the *Law for Election of Members of Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia*.⁷ The law places the responsibility on the media for determining rules for access to the media by candidates and political parties during the election campaign. Many parties complained that the regulations guiding the media are too loose and open to interpretation. In a country without a tradition of impartial media, the power to set media access policy might have been better placed with the SEC or a special media oversight body.

The current law does not specify what constitutes a violation, nor does it provide for specific penalties. Moreover, there is no institutional mechanism by which candidates or parties can present complaints or receive assurances of remedies such as media retractions, corrections or apologies. Parties have also charged that there is insufficient voter education. Only Macedonian Television (MTV) is obliged to provide public service announcements and private stations are exempted. Moreover, the issue of media fairness in news coverage is perhaps more important than providing media access to political candidates.

⁶ ICG visited six randomly-selected municipal offices between 10 and 16 September 1998 to verify the conditions of storing and distributing voter identification cards.

⁷ Article 43 states: "The media in the Republic of Macedonia are to provide equal conditions for equality in presentations of MP candidates, political parties, groups of voters and their programmes. The length of the election presentation, and the advertising conditions and methods for using the programme time, that is, newspaper space for presentation of candidates, political parties, and groups of voters are to be announced by the media no later than 50 days before the election day."