



1998 ELECTIONS IN MACEDONIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Macedonians go to the polls on 18 October 1998 in the first of two rounds of voting to elect 120 members of the country's parliament. The forthcoming poll is Macedonia's third general election since the disintegration of one-party communist rule. Moreover, it takes place in the shadow of ethnic violence between Serbs and ethnic Albanians in the neighbouring Serbian province of Kosovo and political instability in neighbouring Albania. Although Macedonia has managed to avoid the violent conflict which has afflicted the rest of the former Yugoslavia, its experience of democracy has so far been mixed. Politics is divided along ethnic lines and the last multi-party elections in 1994 were marred by accusations of fraud with two major parties boycotting the second round of voting.

After four years of debate, parliament adopted a new electoral system in July 1998. Under the new legislation, parliamentarians are elected by a mixture of a majoritarian, constituency-based system and proportional representation. Of a total of 120 seats, 85 are elected by the former and 35 by the latter system. The introduction of proportional representation ensures that a significant number of minority parties will continue to participate in the government. However, the limited number of seats to be allocated by this method should ensure that the political scene is not excessively cluttered by small parties. Meanwhile, a strong ethnic Macedonian party is likely to continue to act as an anchor in Macedonian politics.

Although, the election laws received the overall support from the parties, there remain some areas of contention. For example, opposition parties consider the media regulations to be lax and fear that there is insufficient education of the voters. In addition, ethnic Albanian political parties have accused the government of deliberately drawing the boundaries between electoral districts in such a way as to dilute the voting strength of their natural supporters. Constituencies which are predominantly comprised of ethnic Albanians have on average some 20,000 voters, whereas, constituencies which are predominantly comprised of ethnic Macedonians tend to average 16,000 voters.