

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1998 parliamentary elections signal a new phase in Macedonia's experiment with electoral reform. The degree to which the elections are considered "free and fair" by the general public and international observers will indicate the level of political maturity that the country has reached. If all political parties endorse the election results, an important political milestone will have been achieved.

These elections will be held under a uniquely Macedonian framework that was constructed to preserve the present political structure. 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 proportional representation should ensure that the political scene is not excessively cluttered by small parties. Meanwhile, a large, strong ethnic Macedonian party is likely to continue to act as an anchor in the country's politics.

Proportional representation may increase the influence of ethnically-based parties, since it encourages ethnic Macedonian parties to create coalitions based on ethnicity rather than on party platforms. For a country which already has a tendency to polarise along ethnic lines, this is likely to be a step backwards.

The development of civil society in Macedonia requires the inclusion of ethnically-based parties in the governing coalition. The balance between ethnic Macedonian treatment of their ethnic Albanian citizens and ethnic Albanian willingness to compromise is the key to preserving internal stability. Ethnic Albanian parties must continue to participate in Macedonia's political life or the country will see further deepening of its ethnic divisions. Much of this depends upon how much tolerance the government shows the Albanians, as well as the pragmatism of Albanian leaders.

With this in mind, ICG recommends the following:

- Public confidence in the integrity and secrecy of the ballot must be restored in Macedonia. The international community should ensure that any declaration of "fair and free" elections is supported by an evaluation of the entire electoral framework rather than just polling day procedures. The opposition parties believe they lost the 1994 elections as a result of electoral fraud and they will be extremely sensitive to any electoral irregularities, irrespective of whether they were intentional or due to administrative shortcomings.
- In the event that the election results are contested as a result of alleged electoral fraud or manipulation, the international community