

1998 ELECTIONS IN MACEDONIA

I. INTRODUCTION

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 were marred by accusations of fraud with two major parties boycotting the second round of voting. As a result, the electorate remains wary of polling.

This report examines the importance of the 1998 parliamentary elections in Macedonia. It discusses past elections and recent changes to the electoral system. The report analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the political parties and coalitions competing in the polls. It looks at the domestic and international issues that dominate the campaign, and the extent of international involvement in the polls. The report also assesses the likely outcome of the elections and potential governing coalitions. And it considers the consequences of the poll on the country's already tense ethnic co-existence. Appendices at the end list the key political parties, the leading candidates on each party's list and the findings of recent opinion polls.

II. EARLIER ELECTORAL EXPERIENCE

The 1990 parliamentary elections took place before Macedonia became an internationally-recognised independent state and were administered by the Republic Electoral Commission along with 120 municipal commissions overseeing each voting district. These first democratic polls were held under a majoritarian, constituency-based electoral system, in which the smaller parties failed to win any seats. The victorious parties supported the continuation of the system under which they had benefited. The more centrist parties and ethnically-based parties lobbied for a switch in electoral systems to one which was a combination of majoritarian and proportional representation or fully proportional.