

Handbook on 2024 Presidential Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia

Second updated edition



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Impressum

Title:

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Free download of this publication at:

www.izbornaarhiva.mk
<https://www.kas.de/en/web/nordmazedonien/home>
<http://www.idscs.org.mk>

We express gratitude to the Electoral Support Programme of the Swiss Cooperation in North Macedonia, implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), for the support and cooperation in preparing this publication.

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Introduction

Introduction to the Seventh Presidential Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia

The seventh presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia will be held on 24 April 2024. Seven candidates will run at the presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia: the incumbent President and candidate of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), Stevo Pendarovski, the candidate of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, the candidate of Levica, Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska, the candidate of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Bujar Osmani, the candidate of the coalition “Vredi”, Arben Taravari, the candidate of “Dvizenje ZNAM – Za nasa Makedonija”, Maksim Dimitrievski, and the candidate of the Civic Option for Macedonia (GROM), Stevcho Jakimovski.

The presidential elections were called on 14.02.2024, when the President of the Assembly, Jovan Mitreski, in accordance with the constitutional and legal obligations, signed the decision to announce the election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia.¹

According to the decision, the first round of presidential elections will be held on April 24, 2024, meaning that the possible second presidential election round will be held on May 8, 2024, along with the regular parliamentary elections.

On 14 February, the State Election Commission (SEC) adopted the calendar of electoral activities to administer the presidential elections.²

According to the calendar, the procedure for collecting signatures for presidential candidates began on 23 February and ended on 8 March at 24:00 hrs. Collecting signatures was carried out in all regional departments and offices of the SEC, located in the seats of 34 local self-government units and before the competent notaries.

According to SEC data, 7 out of 15 candidates collected the necessary 10,000 signatures to partake in the presidential elections. The candidates of VMRO-DPMNE,

1 Decision to call elections <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LgvXvn7cx3IWbxLchlxEZY0cjyiKqYB/view> (last visit 25.03.2024)

2 Calendar of electoral actions for administering the elections for President of the Republic of North Macedonia https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iN8Gim1W542gkDasz_aDHk0pX_43dEcZ/view (last visit 25.03.2024)

Gordana Siljanovska Davkova and SDSM, Stevo Pendarovski, despite the support of the political parties, confirmed their candidacies by collecting signatures.³ The contestants Velo Markovski, Mersiha Smailovic, Gjorgji Manaskov, Zorica Cvetkovska, Gospodin Poposki, Tome Nikolovski, Goce Ristov and Dragan Nikolovski failed to collect the required number of signatures.⁴

The incumbent President, Stevo Pendarovski, officially announced on 01.03.2024 that he would run for office again. In the race for a second term, Pendarovski stressed that he had received public support from a large number of citizens, some of them public figures, professors and cultural workers. SDSM at the congress held on 03.03.2024 with 706 votes in favor, decided to officially support Stevo Pendarovski as their candidate in the presidential elections.⁵ On 04.03.2024, SDSM's traditional coalition partners supported Stevo Pendarovski's candidacy for president. Given the fact that Pendarovski announced that this was a citizen's candidacy, his candidacy was also confirmed by collecting signatures.

The incumbent MP and university professor, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, is a presidential candidate of VMRO-DPMNE. At the party convention held on 02.03.2024, Siljanovska Davkova was elected to be VMRO-DPMNE's candidate in the upcoming presidential elections, with the support of 444 delegates.⁶ Siljanovska Davkova was the only candidate at the party convention, and along with the candidacy she also submitted a plan, a program of work and the required number of signatures of delegates. The candidacy was confirmed by collected signatures from citizens, however, those were not submitted to the SEC.⁷

The current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani, is the presidential candidate of DUI. At the convention held on 9 March under the motto "The time has come for the first Albanian president", DUI promoted their presidential candidate, Bujar Osmani.⁸

3 Status of the number of collected signatures for candidates for President of the country, until 08 March 2024, 20:00 hrs. <https://www.sec.mk/pretsedatelski-izbori-2024/#tab-id-9> (last visit 25.03.2024)

4 The presidential candidate should be nominated by at least 10,000 voters (by collecting signatures) or by 30 MPs.

5 SDSM confirmed the presidential candidacy of Stevo Pendarovski <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32846165.html> (last visit on 25.03.2023)

6 Gordana Siljanovska Davkova was elected as VMRO-DPMNE's candidate for President <https://kanal5.com.mk/gordana-siljanovska-davkova-e-izbrana-za-kandidat-na-vmro-dpmne-za-pretsedatel/a628507> (last visit on 25.03.2023)

7 Siljanovska-Davkova's candidacy to the SEC is without civil signatures because it is a matter of protocol – VMRO-DPMNE says <https://360stepeni.mk/kandidatura-na-siljanovska-davkova-do-dik-e-bez-graganski-potpisi-zatoa-shto-toa-e-protokolarna-rabota-velat-od-vmro-dpmne/> (last visit on 25.03.2023)

8 Osmani officially promoted as presidential candidate of DUI <https://360stepeni.mk/osmani-i-ofitsijalno-promoviran-za-pretsedatelski-kandidat-na-dui-predizvitsite-se-golemi-bitno-e-da-bide-vistinskiot-chovek-na-vistinska-funkcija/> (last visit on 25.03.2023)

The president of the Alliance for Albanians (AA) and the mayor of Gostivar, Arben Taravari, announced on 15 February at a joint press conference with the leaders of Besa- Bilal Kasami, Alternativa- Afrim Gashi and the Democratic Movement - Izet Medziti that he would be a candidate for president of the country. Arben Taravari as the presidential candidate of the Albanian opposition, united in the “Vredi” coalition, was promoted on 2 March at a convention held in Gostivar.⁹ Arben Taravari’s candidacy caused an intra-party split in AA and raised the question of who is the legitimate leader of the party. The former AA leader -Zijadin Sela, pointed out that the party bodies did not take a decision that Taravari would be a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections and that he acted on his own initiative contrary to the party’s position to act independently in elections. On 16 February, at an extraordinary congress attended by 421 delegates, the wing of Arben Taravari dismissed Ziadin Sela as chairman of the Central Presidency and re-elected Taravari as leader of the Alliance for Albanians. Zijadin Sela’s wing at an extraordinary congress on 18 February dismissed Arben Taravari from the party presidency due to a series of violations of the party statute and unanimously, with 591 votes, elected Zijadin Sela as leader of the party.¹⁰

A legal decision is pending from the court in Tetovo as regards who has the right to take over the leadership of the party.

The mayor of Kumanovo and leader of the party ZNAM, Maksim Dimitrievski is a candidate for president of the country from this new political entity in the upcoming presidential elections. Maksim Dimitrievski’s candidacy was formalized at the first congress of the political party “Dvizenje ZNAM – Za nasa Makedonija” held on 22 February in Skopje.¹¹

Professor Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska from the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje is a presidential candidate of the party Levica. Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska’s candidacy was officially announced at a press conference of the party Levica on 7 February.¹²

9 Taravari promoted for presidential candidate, “Vredi” held a Convention in Gostivar <https://plusinfo.mk/taravari-promoviran-za-pretседателски-kandidat-vredi-odrzha-konvenci-a-vo-gostivar/> (last visit on 25.03.2023)

10 Dismissed Sela dismisses Taravari from leadership position in Alliance for Albanians? <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/18/razresheniot-sela-go-razreshi-taravari-od-liderskata-poziczija-vo-alijansa-za-albancite/> (last visit on 25.03.2024)

11 First congress of ZNAM, official presidential candidacy of Maksim Dimitrievski <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/prv-kongres-na-znam-oficijalizirana-pretседателската-kandidatura-na-maksim-dimitrievski/> (last visit on 25.03.2023)

12 Biljana Vankovska - presidential candidate of Levica <https://www.dw.com/mk/profesorkata-biljana-vankovska-vleguva-vo-trkata-za-pretседател-kako-kandidat-na-levica/a-68192357> (last visit 25.03.2024)

The incumbent mayor of the Municipality of Karposh and leader of the GROM party, Stevcho Jakimovski, is a presidential candidate from the party in the upcoming elections. At the session held on 21 February, the Central Board of GROM decided that Stevco Jakimovski will be the party's candidate for president of the country.¹³

At the session held on 22 March, the SEC confirmed the candidacies for President of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2024. Given that the lists of candidates were submitted in accordance with the legal requirements and deadlines, the Commission confirmed the Lists for candidates for President of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2024 in the order of their submission to the State Election Commission.¹⁴

The election campaign for the presidential elections scheduled for 24 April this year begins on 4 April at 00:00 and will continue until 24:00 hrs on 22 April.

On 21 March, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) launched the observation mission in North Macedonia for the presidential and parliamentary elections. 320 observers will be recruited for the two election cycles, 20 long-term and 300 short-term observers.¹⁵

These are the 22nd elections in the country to be monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR. The 2021 local elections were the last elections that were monitored by the mission.

After months of political turmoil over the constitutional changes and the increased demands of the opposition for early parliamentary elections, leaders of the political parties represented in the Parliament at the meeting held on 4 December 2023 agreed on the presidential and parliamentary elections. Political leaders reached an agreement by broad consensus to hold parliamentary elections on Wednesday, 8 May, along with the second round of presidential elections. Earlier, on 24 April, also on Wednesday, the first round of presidential elections will be held. 8 May was the only possible date to ensure that parliamentary elections are held within their regular term, and presidential elections to be completed by the end of Stevo Pendarovski's term of office on 12 May. Apart from the election dates, the leaders of SDSM -Dimitar Kovacevski and VMRO-DPMNE- Hristijan Mickoski, stressed that at the leadership meeting there was also a broad consensus on accepting the OSCE/

13 Stevcho Jakimovski, presidential candidate of GROM <https://24.mk/details/stevcho-jakimovski-kandidat-za-pretседatel-na-grom> (last visit 25.03.2024)

14 Information from the eighty-eighth session of the State Election Commission <https://www.sec.mk/izvestuvanje-od-osumdeset-i-osmata-sednica-na-drzhavnata-izborna-komisija-odrzhana-na-21-mart-2024-godina/> (last visit 25.03.2024)

15 OSCE/ODIHR opens election observation mission in North Macedonia <https://www.osce.org/mk/odihhr/elections/565066> (last visit 25.03.2024)

ODIHR comments on the Electoral Code. At the leadership meeting, no agreement was reached on the constitutional changes.¹⁶

According to the law, on 28 January, or 100 days before the elections, a caretaker (Przino) government was formed. Prime Minister Dimitar Kovacevski and Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi resigned on 25 January. With 65 votes in favor and three against, the Assembly of North Macedonia voted the caretaker government headed by the first Albanian Prime Minister, Talat Xhaferi from DUI.¹⁷ DUI leader - Ali Ahmeti stressed that this was a historic day, and DUI celebrated the election with red ties that read Prime Minister – Albanian – 28.01.2024.¹⁸ The main task of the caretaker government is to organize fair and democratic parliamentary elections. Although the largest opposition party VMRO-DPMNE proposed its own candidates in the government, they did not vote for election of the government as they objected to the government being led by Talat Xhaferi. According to the experiences thus far with the caretaker governments, this political maneuver is happening for the second time because even though SDSM proposed ministers in 2016, they left the session and did not vote for the caretaker government led by Emil Dimitriev from VMRO-DPMNE.¹⁹ This is the third transitional or caretaker government since 2016.

The incumbent president, Stevo Pendarovski, and the candidate of the main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, are running again in these elections, while the Albanian electorate will have the opportunity to vote for two Albanian presidential candidates. To strengthen their positions before the elections, the Albanian political parties raised the question of electing the president in the Assembly, but the main political parties VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM stressed that they were against the idea of scrapping the direct elections for president and electing the head of state by consensus in the Assembly.²⁰

Although on the eve of the presidential elections it was hinted that SDSM and DUI would proceed with a joint presidential candidate, i.e. Stevo Pendarovski would be a consensual candidate again in these elections, DUI decided to have its own candidate in the elections.²¹

16 Agreement reached on elections: Presidential elections on 24 April, and parliamentary elections on 8 May with a second round presidential elections <https://360stepeni.mk/postignat-dogovor-za-izborite-na-24-april-pretседателски-a-na-8-maj-parlamentarni-so-vtor-krug-pretседателски/> (last visit 25.03.2024)

17 Elected caretaker government headed by Xhaferi <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32795231.html> (last visit 25.03.2024)

18 DUI celebrates Xhaferi's election as technical prime minister with red ties - <https://360stepeni.mk/dui-go-slavi-izborot-na-dhaferi-za-tehnichki-premier-so-tsveni-vratovrski/> (last visit on 25.03.2024)

19 In 2016, SDSM did not vote for the caretaker government - <https://alsat.mk/mk/vo-2016-godina-sdsm-ne-glasashe-za-tehnichkata-vlada/> (last visit on 25.03.2024)

20 For and against the election of the President by the Assembly <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/24/za-i-protiv-izborot-na-pretседател-vo-sobranie/> (last visit 25.03.2024)

21 DUI decide to have its own candidate in the presidential elections <https://kanal5.com.mk/dui-odluchi-da-ima-svoj-kandidat-na-pretседатelskite-izbori/a364404> (last visit 25.03.2024)

The reasons for this decision are largely due to the fact that the united Albanian opposition in these elections came up with a joint candidate for president, but also due to the disagreements in the run-up to the elections between DUI and President Pendarovski regarding the Law on Games of Chance.²²

Political disagreements and mutual accusations followed after President Stevo Pendarovski refused to sign the Law on Games of Chance and Entertainment Games, saying this is due to serious indications from the EU that the European flag was being misused.²³

Unlike the previous presidential elections held in 2019 when there were three candidates, there are seven presidential candidates in this election, which will contribute to increased political polarization in the coming period, and given the uncertain election race, one can expect an election campaign focused on discrediting the opponents. The overlap of the election campaigns for the presidential and parliamentary elections will be further utilized to sharpen the political rhetoric aimed at strengthening the positions of the presidential candidates.

In this context, the OSCE/ODIHR in its report assessing the pre-election environment warned of possible volatility and uncertain elections. Concerns have also been expressed about the possible misuse of state resources and pressure on public sector employees, as well as intolerant rhetoric that exacerbates the tense political environment. The report states that media coverage of the election campaign is fragmented and polarized, there is a significant increase in nationalist rhetoric that can result in increased unrest and tensions, as well as rise in intolerant and violent rhetoric that can also be interpreted as hate speech.²⁴

On 18 March, the US Department of State announced that the mayor of the Municipality of Karposh and presidential candidate in the upcoming elections, Stevco Jakimovski, had been blacklisted for corrupt acts that undermine the rule of law and public trust in democratic institutions.²⁵ Candidate Stevco Jakimovski replied that what was happening because of his candidacy is dishonest and that it is an attempt to interfere in the election process.²⁶

22 DUI against Pendarovski: He signed the Criminal Code with the European flag, although the EU objected <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32820714.html> (last visit 25.03.2024)

23 President Pendarovski did not sign the Decree proclaiming the Law on Amending the Law on Games of Chance and Entertainment Games https://pretsedatel.mk/dopis_13022024/ (last visit 25.03.2024)

24 DUI against VREDI: Who is preparing a political crisis? <https://telma.com.mk/2024/03/14/dui-kontra-vredi-koj-podgotvuva-politichka-kriza/> (last visit 25.03.2024)

25 The United States blacklisted Katica Janeva and Stevcho Jakimovski <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32866680.html> (last visit 25.03.2024)

26 Jakimovski on the blacklist: I'm surprised, this is dishonest <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32867504.html> (last visit 25.03.2024)

Given that the parliamentary elections will be held on 8 May, the first round of presidential elections will undoubtedly contribute to the political positioning and mobilization of the parties' membership in the run-up to parliamentary elections. The results of the first round will determine the further political constellations and will lead to pronounced cross-party political negotiations ahead of the parliamentary elections and the certainty of the second round of the presidential elections.

Preparations for the presidential election

On 14 February, the SEC adopted the Calendar of electoral activities to administer the presidential elections.²⁷ Within the preparatory activities, the SEC continuously replaces the members of the Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) whose mandate either terminated or dismissals were requested, but no later than 26 March. According to the calendar, the Municipal Election Commission (MEC) should establish the Election Boards (EBs) no later than 26 March, and by that time the SEC should also form the EBs in the DCOs.

The public inspection of the Voter list in the SEC regional offices, on the website <http://izbirackispisok.gov.mk/>, as well as in the DCOs (for out-of-country voting) was opened in the period 28 February - 18 March 2024. During this period, any citizen who finds they are not on the Voters list and who meets the eligibility criteria to vote, could request to be registered. In the period from the announcement of the elections to the closing of the public inspection of the Voters list, citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia who live abroad and who meet the conditions for out-of-country voting could apply to exercise this right.

The Voter list in which all changes resulting from the public inspection were made, printed in the form of extracts, is concluded by the SEC no later than 15 days after the completed public inspection, i.e. no later than 2 April. The SEC signs the concluded Voter List, i.e. the extracts of the Voter List on which votes are cast, no later than 15 days before the day of the elections, i.e. no later than 8 April.

According to the calendar, the financial reports (specifying the costs of revenues and expenditures on the bank account) of the organizers of the election campaign are submitted to the SEC, the State Audit Office (SAO) and the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) within the following deadlines:

²⁷ Calendar of electoral activities for administering the 2024 elections for President of the Republic of North Macedonia https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iN8Gim1W542gkDasz_aDhK0pX_43dEcZ/view (last visit 25.03.2024)

- » on 12 May for campaign revenues and expenditures from the first round, if a second round of voting is not held, or on 26 May if a second round is held, for the revenues and expenditures in the second part of the election campaign;
- » the total financial report is to be submitted no later than 15 days after the closure of the bank accounts to the SEC, SAO, SCPC and the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Also, broadcasters, print media and electronic media (internet portals) are obliged to submit a report to the Ministry of Finance (MoF), SEC, SAO and SCPC on the advertising space used by each of the participants in the election campaign, no later than 7 May if a second round is not held, and no later than 21 May if a second round of voting is held.

In accordance with Article 8-a of the Electoral Code, 20 days before the start of the election campaign, is the start of a period in which no public events can be held on the occasion of launching a construction or commissioning of a facility or infrastructure financed with funds from the Budget, public funds, as well as funds of public enterprises with state capital.²⁸

With the transitional provision of the amendments to the Electoral Code that will apply only to the elections in 2024, voters will be able to vote with an ID card or a passport whose validity has expired in the period of 9 months until the day of the elections. At the presidential elections, citizens who have expired personal documents on any basis from 24.07.2023 until day of elections or until 24.04.2024 will be able to vote.²⁹

Latest changes to the electoral legislation

Since the last presidential elections in the country, the provisions of the Electoral Code of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) underwent several changes. In March of this year, in a shortened procedure and with 84 votes in favor, the Assembly adopted the new amendments to the Electoral Code. Changes relate to state election management bodies, political campaign finance, campaign participants, as well as election campaign media coverage.³⁰

28 Electoral Code <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZJMruqcNI-yC5VuWSzpft9BFekPhm5An/view> (last visit 25.03.2024)

29 The State Election Commission held a briefing with journalists <https://www.sec.mk/drzhavnata-izborna-komisija-odrzha-brifing-so-novinari/> (last visit 25.03.2024)

30 Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, Law Amending the Electoral Code 58/2024

The new developments with the expired validity of citizens' personal documents led to a serious danger that over 100,000 citizens would be denied the right to vote in the upcoming elections. At the proposal of the SEC, the amendments to the Electoral Code also included a transitional provision to ensure voters' right to vote with an ID card or passport that expired in the period of nine months until the day of the presidential and parliamentary elections.³¹

Furthermore, the provisions on registration of new voters have been clarified, so everyone who turns 18 until Election Day will have the right to vote, meaning that citizens who become adults between the two election cycles will only have the right to vote in parliamentary elections.³²

Three days prior to the start of the presidential election campaign, MPs unanimously adopted the Law Amending the Electoral Code that further clarifies the provisions on determining the ordinal number on the ballot for both electoral cycles, i.e. political parties that nominated or supported a presidential candidate can keep the same ordinal numbers also for the parliamentary elections, thus ensure more visible presentation to citizens. Political parties that do not nominate a presidential candidate, but run for parliamentary elections, will draw lots at the SEC to determine the actual ordinal numbers for the elections.³³

State Election Commission

A citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia with a permanent residence in the country, university degree, at least eight years of work experience and who is not a member of a political party body can be elected to be member of the State Election Commission. The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia publishes the announcement for election of the new SEC composition, i.e. President, Vice President and members of the SEC in the Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia and in daily newspapers within 30 days prior to the expired term of the Commis-

31 Over 100,000 citizens do not have documents for voting in elections, the SEC proposed amendments to the Electoral Code, the Assembly on the move" Telma, March 04, 2024. Accessed at: <https://telma.com.mk/2024/03/04/nad-100-000-gragani-nemaat-dokumenti-za-glasane-na-izbori-sobranieto-na-poteg-otkako-dik-predlozhi-izmeni-na-izborniot-zakonik/> (last visit: 27 March 2024)

32 "SEC: Citizens who turn 18 between the two rounds of the presidential election on May 8 will only be able to vote for the election of MPs" 360 degrees, March 15, 2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/dik-graganite-shto-ke-napolnat-18-godini-pomegu-dvata-kruga-na-pretседателските-избори-na-8-maj-ke-mozhe-da-glasaat-samo-za-izbor-na-pratenitsi/> (last visit: 26 March 2024)

33 "Deadline to register candidate lists for parliamentary elections ends today, the Voter List is also closed" 360 stepeni, 2 April 2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/deneska-zavrshuva-rokot-za-prijavuvane-na-listite-za-pratenitsi-se-zakluchuva-i-izbirachkiot-spisok/> (last visit: 2 April 2024)

sion. The advertisement lasts for eight days from the date of publication in the Official Gazette.

The procedure applied to elect members has remained unchanged. It is prepared and implemented by the Committee on Election and Appointment Issues within the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Committee drafts a proposal for a list of registered candidates and submits it to the Assembly. Of the candidates on the list, the opposition proposes a president and two members, while the ruling parties propose a vice-president and three members. All members are elected by a two-thirds majority of the total number of MPs.

Several articles governing the election, term and work of the State Election Commission were changed with the interventions made to the Electoral Code in September 2021. Changes to Article 26 stipulate that the term of the members of the Commission is increased to five years as of the day of election. Furthermore, changes made in Article 27, 29 and 30 stipulate for the first time the process of reorganizing the Commission's composition if the Government changes, as well as the election of new members and the Secretary General.³⁴

Amendments to the Electoral Code of this year oblige the State Election Commission to establish a Center for continuous electoral education as a separate organizational unit in its secretariat, headed by a state adviser at B1 level³⁵, who reports to the Commission and the Secretary General. The Center will provide continuous training to the election administration, voters, election participants, media, and election observers, and will conduct various research studies and analysis which are needed and requested by the SEC.³⁶

Party Finance

The Law on Party Finance has not been amended in the last few years. The provisions on specification of assets and party finance (movable and immovable property), the total funds for annual party finance in the amount of 0.15% of the total source revenues of the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia, the private

34 Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, Law Amending the Electoral Code 218/2021

35 According to Article 24 of the Law on Administrative Servants, a civil servant of B1 category is a managerial administrative servant of level one, who fulfills the requirements, i.e. at least two years of managerial position in the public sector, or, at least three years of managerial position in the private sector.

36 Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, Law Amending the Electoral Code 58/2024

sources of funding, the amount of individual donations that may not exceed the amount of 60 average salaries as a donation from legal entities and 30 net average salaries as a donation from individuals, still remain valid. With the latest amendments to the Electoral Code in March 2024, a new paragraph was added to Article 83 regulating the individual donations that political parties receive for election campaigns. That is, the cumulative amount on the election campaign bank account from the same natural person must not exceed 3,000 euros in denar counter value or 30,000 Euros in denar counter value from the same legal entity.

Party finance in the amount of 30% that is provided from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia is still equally distributed to all political parties that won at least 1% of the total number of votes at the last parliamentary or local elections. 70% of the funds are allocated to political parties according to the number of elected MPs in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia at the last parliamentary elections and according to the number of elected councilors at the last local elections.

Article 26 of the Law on Party Finance stipulates that the State Audit Office oversees the party finance. This Article also stipulates that parties have only one bank account, and if funds are provided from commercial bank loan, in addition to the basic bank account, parties may have another special bank account for party finance secured from a loan. Also, a political party can transfer funds on/to these accounts, while party research-analytical centers have a separate account. The amount of 280,000 Euro in denar counter value from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia is stipulated for annual funding of the Research-analytical centers of political parties which are established in accordance with the law as part of the party's internal organization.³⁷

Pursuant to the amended law in 2018, political parties have an obligation to submit a financial report on the party's material-financial operations, which also includes the financial operations on the party's account, i.e. accounts. An additional part of the financial report, that is, items "sponsorship" and "loan" are also stipulated in the amendments. In addition, amendments stipulate that the funds intended for party finance will be paid from the Budget based on possibilities, but no later than March 1 of each current year.

37 Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia, Law Amending the Law on Party Finance, 140/2018

Public media

The ban imposed with the amendments to the Electoral Code in 2018 that from the day of announcing the elections until the election campaign start, all broadcasters, print media and electronic media (portals) may not broadcast, i.e. publish paid political advertising, except for advertisements and announcements aimed for collecting signatures in support of the candidacy of a group of voters, will remain valid also for this election cycle. Any broadcasting, i.e. publishing of announcements for collecting signatures in support of the candidacies is done in marked advertising blocks of the allowed advertising time per real hour. The amendments to the Electoral Code from March 2024, provide for a restriction in the promotion of candidates, i.e., once the candidate lists are confirmed and until the start of the election campaign, election contestants have the right to organize one public event to promote their confirmed lists of candidate/s and electoral programs. Accordingly, Article 69-a prohibits the parties to spend the funds allocated for the election campaign in the previously mentioned period.

Broadcasters covering elections, in the first and second round of election campaign, may broadcast a total of nine minutes and thirty seconds per real hour of program that is solely intended for paid political advertising. Of these nine and a half minutes, a total of four minutes may be allocated to the two biggest ruling parties, four minutes for the two biggest oppositional parties, one minute for political parties in the Assembly that did not win sufficient number of seats at the last election to establish a parliamentary group, as well as thirty seconds for political parties not represented in the Assembly. Given that double elections are held this year, there is a possibility that political parties are advertised for a total of 19 minutes per hour. Earlier, this was the case with the electoral campaign for the 2014 double elections when the political parties agreed on a limit of 15 minutes promotion per hour.³⁸

Pursuant to the Electoral Code changes from 2021, instead of the Ministry of Finance, the duty to reimburse invoice-based costs to broadcasters, printed and electronic media for paid political advertising is delegated to the State Election Commission. Along with an invoice, media are required to submit a media plan as well as Report on provided services that are confirmed both by broadcasters, printed media and electronic media (portals) and the election participants themselves.

38 "2024 Elections: A party propaganda program of epic proportions", Prizma, 8 February 2024. Accessed at: <https://prizma.mk/izbori-2024-partisko-epp-od-epski-razmeri/> (last visit: 26 March 2024)

With the latest amendments to the Electoral Code, the public broadcasting service, as well as the television stations that broadcast paid political advertising, have the obligation to broadcast election-related content in a format accessible to persons with disabilities, i.e. using sign language, subtitles, tone description or other tools to ensure accessibility, at least once, in the period from 16:00 to 24:00 hrs. Furthermore, Article 75 stipulates an obligation for service providers, prior to the start of the election campaign, to submit a schedule to the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services (AAVMS) of the edition of news and other content that will be broadcast in a format accessible to persons with disabilities, that will be published by the AAVMS on its website.



History of the presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia (1991 – 2019)

1. History of the presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia (1991 – 2019)

The first president of independent Macedonia was Kiro Gligorov, elected by secret ballot in the Macedonian Parliament on January 27, 1991, with 114 votes in favor. All subsequent presidents were elected at general and direct elections. In the first such election in 1994, the then President Gligorov won his second consecutive term. Gligorov is the only president so far who managed to win the first election round. In the second general and direct elections in 1999, six candidates joined the presidential race, and the victory in the second round was taken by VMRO-DPMNE's candidate, Boris Trajkovski. He held the office of President until his tragic death in 2004. At the early presidential elections in 2004, SDSM candidate Branko Crvenkovski was elected the third President of the Republic of Macedonia. In the fourth presidential elections in 2009, Gjorge Ivanov won his first term and secured his second term in the 2014 elections when he defeated the incumbent President Stevo Pendarovski in the second round.

More information on the history of presidential elections since independence to date can be found in the Manual for Presidential Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia 2019.³⁹



Stevo Pendarovski, Fifth President of the Republic of North Macedonia (2019-2024)

The incumbent President of the Republic, Stevo Pendarovski, through a second attempt, managed to win the post in the presidential cabinet after winning the sixth two-round presidential election. In the presidential race in 2019, three candidates participated: Stevo Pendarovski, SDSM candidate with the support of DUI, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, candidate of VMRO-DPMNE, and Blerim Reka, who ran as an independent candidate, but was supported by the Alliance for Albanians and BESA.

In the first election round on April 21, 2019, the right to vote was exercised by 753,556 citizens, i.e.

³⁹ Manual for Presidential Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia 2019, second supplemented edition. KAS and IDSCS, 2019. page 17-22. https://izbornaarhiva.mk/dokumentacija/priracnici/Belegexemplar_2019_The_Republic_of_Macedonia_s_2019_Presidential_Elections_Handbook_ENG.pdf (last visit: 28 March 2024)

41.68% of all registered voters. After counting the votes, Pendarovski won 42.81% of the votes, i.e. 322,581 votes, Siljanovska Davkova won 318,341 votes i.e. 42.25% of the votes and candidate Blerim Reka won 79,888 votes or 10.60% of the total votes. In the second round held on 5 May 2019, the candidates supported by SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE secured a place. The winner of the elections in the second round was the incumbent President, Stevo Pendarovski, with 51.65% of the votes (435.656 votes), while his opponent, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, won 44.75% of the votes (377.446 votes). The turnout of citizens in the second election round was 46.65%, i.e. 843.508 voters.⁴⁰

40 North Macedonia, Presidential Elections, 21 April and 5 May 2019: Final Report of the ODIHR Monitoring Mission, 21 August 2019. Accessed at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/3/428867_0.pdf (last visit: 27 March 2024)

2

Macedonian Electoral System for Presidential Elections

2. Macedonian Electoral System for Presidential Elections

The President of the Republic is elected at general and direct elections, by secret ballot, with a 5-year term and right to be reelected twice. The election of the President is governed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Electoral Code. Presidential elections are administered on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia and in its diplomatic and consular missions that comprise one electoral district under the majority electoral system. Every Macedonian citizen who has reached the age of 40 on Election Day and has been a resident of the country for at least ten in the last 15 years has the right to be elected. A candidate for president can be nominated by at least 10,000 voters or at least 30 MPs.⁴¹

The election of the President is almost always administered in two election rounds. In the first round, the winner is the candidate who will win a majority (50%+1 voter) of the total number of registered voters in the Voter List. If neither candidate reaches the required majority, a second round of voting is administered within 14 days, which includes the two candidates that won most of the votes in the first round. In the second round, the candidate who won a majority of the total number of votes will be elected, whereby at least 40% of the registered voters are required to exercise their right to vote. If neither candidate fulfils both conditions, the entire election procedure is repeated.⁴²

The number of polling stations in the country for the presidential elections this year is 3480, while 31 polling stations are provided for out-of-country voting in the diplomatic and consular missions. Diaspora voting is administered only in the representative offices where at least ten Macedonian citizens applied to vote.⁴³ The election campaign for the election of the President begins 20 days before Election Day and lasts up to one day before elections. The campaign for the 2024 presidential elections begins on April 4 at 00:00 and ends on April 22 at 24:00 hrs., when the election silence actually begins.⁴⁴

41 Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no.52/1991, as amended by Amendments I-XXXVI.

42 Ibid.

43 "A total of 2,571 citizens abroad will be able to vote in the presidential elections" Radio Free Europe, 27 March 2024. Accessed at <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32880067.html> (last visit: 28 March 2024)

44 "The election campaign for the presidential elections from 4 to 22 April, for the parliamentary elections from 18 April to 6 May. Accessed at: <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/izbornata-kampanja-za-pretsedatelskite-izbori-od-4-do-22-april-za-parlamentarnite-od-18-april-do-6-maj/> (last visit: 28 March 2024)

By assuming office, the President is given a series of functions and exclusive rights. The President is granted a mandate to represent the Republic at home and abroad, to act as the supreme commander of the armed forces, to grant the mandate for the composition of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, to appoint and recall ambassadors and MPs abroad, to receive the credentials of foreign diplomatic representatives in the country, to propose two judges of the Constitutional Court, two members of the Republic Judicial Council, three members of the Security Council, and to appoint and dismiss other holders of state and public offices determined by the Constitution and laws. In addition, the President awards decorations and recognitions, grants pardons in accordance with the law and performs other functions that are specified in the Constitution of the state. The office of President of the Republic is incompatible with another public, political or professional function. The President enjoys immunity in the exercise of his office, but if the President violates the Constitution and the laws, s/he must be held accountable. The procedure for determining such responsibility is initiated at the Assembly by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of MPs. The responsibility of the President is decided by the Constitutional Court by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of judges.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, the State Election Commission (SEC) is responsible for the legality, preparation and administering of elections, but also for supervising the work of the electoral management bodies. The competences of the SEC also include the publication of the Voters List, which should be open for public inspection to citizens within 15 days from the date of the announcement of the elections. The public inspection of the Voter List lasts 20 days. In addition to the Commission and authorized representatives of the list submitters, all domestic and foreign civil society organizations holding SEC accreditation have the right to observe the elections.

More information regarding the electoral system and campaign, the role of public media, as well as the mandate of the President can be found in the Manual for Presidential Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia 2019.⁴⁵

45 Manual for presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia 2019, second supplemented edition. KAS and IDSCS, 2019. page 23-36. Accessed at: https://izbornaarhiva.mk/dokumentacija/priracnici/Belegexemplar_2019_The_Republic_of_Macedonia_s_2019_Presidential_Elections_Handbook_ENG.pdf (last visit: 28 March 2024)



3

**Participants in the presidential
elections 2024**

3. Participants in the presidential elections 2024⁴⁶

Stevo Pendarovski



Stevo Pendarovski is the current President of the Republic of North Macedonia, elected at the 2019 presidential elections. Prior to taking office, he was a professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the American College in Skopje (UACS), where he taught the following subjects: International Security, International Relations, Introduction to Politics, Globalization, Geopolitics, US Foreign Policy, EU Foreign and Security Policy and Small States in World Politics. He graduated in 1987 from the Faculty of Law at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, and completed his master's and doctoral studies at the Institute for Sociological and Political-Legal Research in Skopje.

This is the third presidential candidacy of Pendarovski, who lost to Gjorge Ivanov in the second round of voting in the 2014 presidential election. He ran as a joint candidate of SDSM, DUI and 29 other political parties in the 2019 presidential elections.⁴⁷

He holds a master's degree in "New Geopolitics of the Republic of Macedonia: Contradictions of the Communist and Transitional Matrices", and a doctoral degree on the topic "Foreign and Security Policy of the EU and Small States: Framework of National Discourse".⁴⁸

In the period 2001-2004, Stevo Pendarovski was a national security adviser in the Cabinet of President Boris Trajkovski, and in the period 2005-2009 he served as a foreign policy adviser in the Cabinet of President Branko Crvenkovski. He was also President of the State Election Commission, in the period 2004 – 2005. Previously, from 1998 to 2001, he worked as an Assistant minister at the Ministry of Interior

46 Candidates are ranked according to the established single list of candidates for President of the Republic of North Macedonia by the State Election Commission, that was adopted by drawing lots on 25.3.2024. The photographs of the candidates are taken from their official Facebook profiles.

47 Manual for presidential elections 2019. Accessed at: https://izbornaarhiva.mk/dokumentacija/priracnici/Belegexemplar_2019_The_Republic_of_Macedonia_s_2019_Presidential_Elections_Handbook_ENG.pdf (last visit: 20.3.2024).

48 Handbook for Presidential Elections 2014. Accessed: https://izbornaarhiva.mk/dokumentacija/priracnici/Belegexemplar_2019_The_Republic_of_Macedonia_s_2019_Presidential_Elections_Handbook_ENG.pdf (last visit: 4.3.2019).

and as head of the Analytical and Research Directorate within the Ministry. At the 2016 parliamentary elections, Stevo Pendarovski was elected MP in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, and in November 2017 he was appointed as national coordinator for the preparations in the Republic of North Macedonia for NATO membership.⁴⁹

He is the author of several books and academic papers published in the country and beyond, and has participated in numerous academic conferences, public debates and discussions.

In the 2024 presidential elections, he will run as a candidate of the SDSM-led coalition.⁵⁰

Stevo Pendarovski was born on April 3, 1963 in Skopje. He is married and has one child.

Gordana Siljanovska Davkova



Gordana Siljanovska Davkova is a retired full Professor of Constitutional Law and Political System at the Faculty of Law “Iustinianus Primus” at the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje. She completed her primary and secondary education in Skopje, after which she continued her education at the Faculty of Law, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje. She completed her undergraduate studies in 1978, and continued her education with a master’s degree at the same faculty. In 1994, she completed her doctoral studies Cum laude at the Faculty of Law in Ljubljana, Republic of Slovenia. In

1994, she was elected as Assistant Professor, in 1999 as Associate Professor, and in 2004 as full-time Professor at the Department of Constitutional Law and Political System at the Faculty of Law in Skopje.

49 Website of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia. Accessed at: <https://pretsedatel.mk/biografija-na-pretsedatelot/> (last visit: 21.3.2024).

50 Website of SDSM. Accessed at: СДСМ - Социјалдемократски Сојуз на Македонија (sdsd.org.mk) (last visit: 26.3.2024).

Professor Siljanoska Davkova is the author and co-author of more than 200 titles in the field of law, political system and constitutional law. In 2016, students voted her as the most inspiring professor at the Faculty of Law. She is the founder of clinical (practical) legal education in the Republic of Macedonia. She was the Head of the Institute of Legal and Legal-Political Sciences and a member of the Dean's Office, and Head of the Department of Constitutional Law and Political System. She is one of the founders of political studies and political science in the country.

In her social engagement, she was a member of the Constitutional Committee in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia (1991 – 1992); Minister without Portfolio in the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (1992 – 1994); President of the Coordinating Body for Cooperation with CEELI (Central and Eastern European Legal Initiative) founded by the American Bar Association (ABA) in 1992-1994; founder and member of the First Macedonian Council of the European Movement; President of the Macedonian National Committee for Gender Equality (1999 – 2002); President of the Women's Lobby, Working Group on Gender Issues (2002 – 2004); President of the Civil Movement of Macedonia (2004 – 2005); and one of the founders of the Euro-Balkan Institute.

In 1991, she was a member of the expert group of the Geneva Conference on the former Yugoslavia. As of 1994, she was one of UNDP's gender experts, and in 1998 a UN electoral expert. She was a member of the Steering Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) of the Council of Europe (1996 – 2002). She has been a member of the International Association for Constitutional Law since 1999 until nowadays. From 2002 to 2023 she was a member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, Council of Europe, Strasbourg where she was also Vice-President (2004 – 2012). In the period 2008 – 2016, she represented the Republic of Macedonia in the Venice Commission. She has received many awards, including for her contribution to the rule of law from the OSCE Mission to Skopje and a medal for her work on gender equality from the Union of Women of Macedonia. In 2019, she was a candidate in the presidential elections supported by VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition. In the second round of elections, her opponent Stevo Pendarovski was elected president.⁵¹

In the early parliamentary elections in 2020, Siljanovska Davkova was the candidate list leader for MPs of VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition in electoral district 1. As an independent MP within the parliamentary group of VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition,

51 Manual for presidential elections in 2019. Accessed at: https://izbornaarhiva.mk/dokumentacija/priracnici/Belegexemplar_2019_The_Republic_of_Macedonia_s_2019_Presidential_Elections_Handbook_ENG.pdf (last visit: 20.3.2024).

she was elected Chairwoman of the Committee on Equality between Women and Men, a member of the Political System Committee and the Education Committee, as well as of the National Council for European Integration. She is also a member of the Steering Committee for Cooperation with the Swedish Parliament and the Committee for Cooperation with the Israeli Parliament. She is a deputy member of the Committee on European Affairs and the OSCE delegation.

In the 2024 presidential elections, she will run as a candidate of VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition.⁵²

Gordana Siljanovska Davkova was born on May 11, 1953 in Ohrid. She is married and has two children.⁵³

Stevcho Jakimovski



Stevcho Jakimovski graduated from the Faculty of Economics in Skopje in 1987. In 1988, he was a volunteer journalist in the sports editorial office of Radio Skopje, and then in the information and political editorial office of the second program of Radio Skopje.

From October 1988 to May 1990, he was an expert-political worker at the Presidency of the Union of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia. In 1992, he became director of the tour agency “Katlanovo-Tours” – Skopje.

In September 2000, he was elected to be Mayor of the Municipality of Karposh, and in November 2003 as Minister of Economy in the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, and from 2004 to 2006 he was Minister of Labor and Social Policy.

In April 2009, he won the local elections and for the second time became mayor of the Municipality of Karposh. Four years later, in March 2013, he run independently in the elections and won the trust of the citizens of Karposh for the third time.

52 Website of VMRO-DPMNE. Accessed at: VMRO-DPMNE – VMRO-DPMNE (vmro-dpmne.org.mk) (accessed: 26.3.2024).

53 Curriculum Vitae; website of the Faculty of Law “Iustinian Primus” Skopje; Accessed at: <http://pf.ukim.edu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/C.V.-GORDANA-SILJANOVSKA-DAVKOVA-2c-2016.pdf> (last visit: 21.3.2024).

In September 2013, he founded the political party Civic Option for Macedonia – GROM, and was elected its president. GROM has been part of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia since 2014. In October 2021, in the local elections, Jakimovski ran as a candidate for mayor of GROM and won the citizens' trust for the fourth time.

At the presidential elections in 2024, he will run as a candidate of the coalition led by the Civic Option for Macedonia – GROM.⁵⁴

Stevcho Jakimovski was born on 27.8.1960 in Kriva Palanka. He is married and father of two children.⁵⁵

Bujar Osmani



Bujar Osmani graduated from the Medical Faculty in Skopje in 2004. He completed part of his specialization in London, United Kingdom, in the period 2006 – 2007, while from 2012 he acquired the title of specialist surgeon. In 2014 he started his doctoral studies at the School of Doctoral Studies at the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje, where he received his doctorate in July 2018.

In 2008, he was appointed Minister of Health of the Republic of Macedonia and held this function until 2011. In 2011, he was a specialist surgeon at the University Clinic for Digestive Surgery in Skopje. The same year, the Democratic Union for Integration appointed him a Secretary for Public Communication of the party presidency.

From 2017 to July 2020, he served as Deputy Prime Minister in charge of European Affairs. As Head of the Secretariat for European Affairs, Osmani also served as the National Coordinator for the allocation of foreign assistance and IPA funds in the country.

⁵⁴ Website of GROM. Accessed at: Мојот потпис за Стевчо Јакимовски – Граѓанска Опција за Македонија (grom.mk) (last visit: 26.3.2024).

⁵⁵ Website of the Municipality of Karposh. Accessed at : <https://karpos.gov.mk/Mayor/> (last visit: 15.3.2024).

From 2018 to July 2020, he was appointed Head of State Delegation and Chief Negotiator with the European Union.

Osmani was a permanent member of the Government Crisis Headquarters for dealing with COVID-19, and in the first half of 2020 he was appointed Chief Coordinator of the local crisis headquarters and the Crisis Headquarters of the City of Skopje.

On 30 August 2020, Bujar Osmani was elected Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia.

In the 2024 presidential elections, he will run as a candidate of the DUI-led coalition.⁵⁶

Bujar Osmani was born on September 11, 1979 in Skopje. He is married and has three children.⁵⁷

Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska



Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska is a doctor of law and a full-time professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje. She is the Head of the Center for Global Change. She has been a representative of the Institute for Security, Defense and Peace at the Faculty of Philosophy in the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions since 2017. She was a member of the executive board of the Committee on Society and the Armed Forces within the International Political Science Association (IPSA). She was a representative of the Republic of Macedonia, that is, of the Institute for Security, Defense and Peace in the Consortium of Military Academies and Security Institutes within the Partnership for Peace (from its establishment in 1999 to 2003).

56 Website of the Democratic Union for Integration. Accessed at: Bujar Osmani: Të përqëndrohemi në heqjen e barrierave që na mbajnë jashtë rrugës së progresit e zhvillimit të shekullit XXI - Bashkimi Demokratik Për Integrim (bdi.mk) (last visit: 25.3.2024).

57 Website of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Accessed at: <https://vlada.mk/minister/BujarOsmani> (last visit: 15.3.2024).

She is a member of the editorial boards of several renowned scientific journals in various countries. She is a member of numerous world academic associations, and is a member of several initiatives related to global governance and disarmament in the 21st century.

She published the following textbooks: “Defence and the Law”, “Political System” (two editions), “European Institutions” (two editions), “International Security” and “Transitional Justice”. She was a member of the Inter-ministerial expert group for the preparation of the Report on the compatibility of the country’s legislation with the standards and requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In her public engagement, Vankovska was a public advocate of the REKOM Initiative in the Republic of Macedonia. She was vice president of the Civic Movement of Macedonia in 2004 – 2005, and especially active in the referendum campaign for the Law on Municipal Borders of 2004. She was one of the founders of the “Professor’s Plenum”, active in the protests against the restriction of the right to abortion, the protests against the Prespa Agreement and the change of the Constitution, etc.

In the 2024 presidential elections, she will run as a candidate of Levica.

Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska was born on 14 November 1959 in Skopje and is mother of three children⁵⁸.

Arben Taravari



Arben Taravari is a neurologist with many years of experience at the University Clinic of Neurology in Skopje. In 1998 he graduated from the Medical Faculty at the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius”, and in 2006 completed a specialization in neurology at the University Clinic of Neurology. He completed the second specialization in family medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in 2011. He is president of the board of the University Clinic of Neurology, as well as member of the board of the medical journal *Medicus* and *Vox Medici*.

⁵⁸ Website of the party Levica. Accessed at: <https://levica.mk/pretsedatelski-kandidat-2024/> (last visit: 15.3.2024).

He published several books and academic papers including: “Migraines, headaches and painful syndromes” (2016), “Practicum of Neurology” (2014), and his doctoral dissertation is on “Clinical and genetic findings in patients with idiopathic Parkinson’s disease” (2011).

Taravari’s recent political career began with the Alliance for Albanians in 2016, led by the President Zijadin Sela, where Taravari was elected Secretary General. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Alliance for Albanians won three parliamentary seats, including that of Taravari.

On 1 June 2017, Taravari was appointed Minister of Health in the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, a post he held until 31.10.2017.

Dr. Arben Taravari took the mayoral position in Gostivar in 2017, after winning the local elections by defeating the then incumbent mayor of DUI Nevzat Bejta⁵⁹ In 2021, after completing his first term in office, Taravari ran again as a candidate of the Alliance for Albania and won his second term as mayor of Gostivar.⁶⁰

After the appointment of Taravari by the party’s Central Assembly as acting party president in December 2022, at the third extraordinary Congress of the party Alliance for Albanians, Taravari was elected party president.⁶¹

In February 2024, Taravari announced the candidacy for president of the country on the proposal of the AA Presidency, with the support of the Albanian opposition parties. The candidacy comes at a time of intra-party tensions in the Alliance for Albanians.⁶²

In the 2024 presidential elections, he will run as a candidate of the “VREDI” coalition.⁶³

Arben Taravari was born on April 9, 1973 in Gostivar. He is married and father of two children.⁶⁴

59 Website of the Municipality of Gostivar. Accessed at: <https://gostivari.gov.mk/dr-arben-taravari/> (last visit: 15.3.2024).

60 Manual for local elections in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021. Accessed: https://izbornaarhiva.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/belegexemplar_2021_the_republic_of_north_macedonias_2021_local_elections_handbook_eng_version-1.pdf (last visit: 25.3.2024).

61 Website of Alliance for Albanians. Accessed at: Then, the taravari - the alliance for the Albanians (aleanca.mk) (last visit: 26.3.2024).

62 Arben Taravari is presidential candidate of the Albanian opposition (slobodnaevropa.mk) (last visit: 26.3.2024).

63 Website of Alternativa. Accessed at: <https://alternativa.org.mk> (last visit: 26.3.2024).

64 Website of Vistinomer. Accessed at: <https://vistinomer.mk/arben-taravari-gradonachalnik-na-gostivar/> (last visit: 15.3.2024).

Maksim Dimitrievski



Maksim Dimitrievski graduated from the Faculty of Law in Skopje. He completed his master studies in 202 on the topic “The role of local self-government in emergency and crisis situation, under conditions of epidemic, with focus on the Municipality of Kumanovo”. He has many years of work experience as a private entrepreneur.

He began his political career as a young activist of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia. In 2008, he became part of the Council of the Municipality of Kumanovo, and later President of the Council from 2012 to 2016. He continued his political career as an MP in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia and Chairman of the Committee on Defense and Security.

At the local elections in October 2017, he became mayor of the Municipality of Kumanovo. After completing his first term, he ran for a second time, but as an independent candidate, and due to the decision to run independently in the local elections in 2021, he was excluded from the SDSM party. Maksim Dimitrievski won the local elections in Kumanovo and became mayor of the Municipality of Kumanovo for the second time with a mandate from 2021 to 2025.⁶⁵ In October 2024, he established the new political party “Dvizenje ZNAM – Za nasa Makedonija” and at the same time was elected party leader.

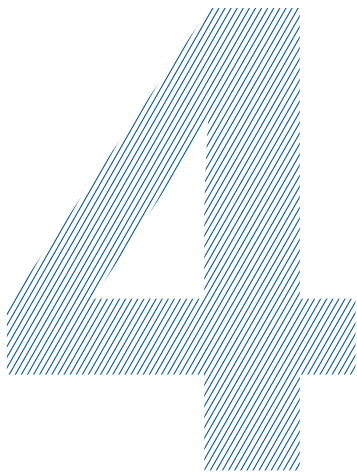
In the 2024 presidential elections, he will run as a candidate of the “Dvizenje ZNAM- Za nasa Makedonija”.⁶⁶

Maksim Dimitrievski was born on 29 November 1975 in Kumanovo. He is married and father of three children.⁶⁷

65 Manual for local elections in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021. Accessed at: https://izbornaarhiva.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/belegexemplar_2021_the_republic_of_north_macedonias_2021_local_elections_handbook_eng_version-1.pdf (last visit: 25.3.2024).

66 Website of Dvizenje ZNAM- Za nasa Makedonija. Accessed at: [Движење ЗНАМ - За наша Македонија - Движење ЗНАМ - За наша Македонија \(dvizenjeznam.org.mk\)](https://dvizenjeznam.org.mk) (last visit: 25.3.2024).

67 Website of the Municipality of Kumanovo. Accessed at: <https://kumanovo.gov.mk/gradonacalnik/> (last visit: 15.3.2024).



4

The Republic of North Macedonia's 2024 Presidential Elections – Results, Campaign, Assessments

4. The Republic of North Macedonia's 2024 Presidential Elections – Results, Campaign, Assessments

Introduction

The first and second rounds of the seventh presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia were held on 24 April and 8 May 2024. Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, candidate of the then-opposition party VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition “Your Macedonia”, won both rounds of elections.

The presidential elections were officially called on 14 February, 2024, with the election campaign scheduled to begin on 4 April 2024. All candidates confirmed their nominations by securing the required number of citizen signatures, with the exception of candidate Siljanovska Davkova who, despite collecting nearly 30,000 signatures, opted to refrain from submitting them to the State Election Commission (SEC) instead formalizing her candidacy with the support of 30 Members of Parliament. As in previous elections, concerns were raised regarding possible failure to meet the required voter turnout of 40 per cent. However, despite the lower turnout in the second election round in regions with predominantly ethnic Albanian population, the census requirement was successfully met.

A total of seven candidates contested the first round of the presidential elections. Alongside Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, the incumbent President Stevo Pendarovski, endorsed by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), ran for re-election. Other candidates included Bujar Osmani, the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, supported by the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Arben Taravari from VLEN/VREDI coalition, Maksim Dimitrievski from ZNAM Movement – For Our Macedonia, Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska from the *Left* Party, and Stevčo Jakimovski from Bravely for Macedonia coalition. Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova and Stevo Pendarovski competed in the second round. Of the 1,814,317 registered voters, 905,971 (49.93 per cent) participated in the first round, while 861,218 (47.47 per cent) voted in the second round.

The State Election Commission (SEC) accredited a total of 942 observers, including international journalists and translators, comprising 342 domestic and 568 international

observers. This represents a significant decrease compared to previous presidential elections, with 3,156 domestic and 433 international observers in the first round, and 3,321 domestic and 809 international observers in the second round. Observers generally assessed that the elections upheld fundamental freedoms and were conducted effectively within a fair and democratic environment.

This Handbook also provides a comprehensive overview of the election campaign, including the financial reporting of parties and coalitions, media coverage, election results, protection of voting rights, evaluations by observers and political parties, as well as summarized conclusions on the entire election cycle.

Election Campaign

The official presidential campaign commenced on April 4, with seven candidates pledging to conduct their campaigns fairly and democratically, a commitment that was largely adhered to. The campaign was marked by positive candidate promotion, however it also featured frequent mutual accusations, discrediting of opponents, insults, and denigrations among all contenders. Candidates employed various methods to engage voters, including citizen meetings, television advertisements, guest appearances on shows and podcasts, online ads, videos, and significant activity on social networks. In addition to traditional platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), this campaign also saw substantial activity on TikTok, a social network popular among younger audiences. A notable feature of this campaign was the extensive involvement of political parties in campaign activities. Party leaders, parliamentary candidates, list leaders, and other party members organized and participated in large rallies, citizen meetings, issued statements, and maintained a strong presence on social media. The heightened engagement and often contentious rhetoric were largely driven by the fact that the second round of the presidential elections coincided with the parliamentary elections, allowing parties to leverage the presidential campaign to bolster their parliamentary prospects.

According to the Ministry of Interior (Mol), the first round of Election Day proceeded largely without major obstacles or incidents. A total of 12 cases of unauthorized photography and two instances of ballot tearing were reported. Additionally, there were six reports of attempted bribery and 15 reports of agitation at the polling stations. The Mol also indicated that two criminal charges would be filed for violations related to the secrecy of voting and infringements on the right to

vote.⁶⁸ The Mol further assessed that the second round of the presidential and parliamentary elections was conducted in a fair, democratic, and free atmosphere, with no serious violations reported. The Ministry indicated that this may have been the most peaceful election to date from a security standpoint.⁶⁹

In his bid for a second term, Stevo Pendarovski campaigned under the slogan “Our President Stevo.” Throughout the campaign, he frequently referenced his five-year presidential tenure to highlight what citizens could expect from him and the values he represents. Pendarovski emphasized his achievements during his first term, particularly in advancing European integration, and underscored his commitment to maintaining the country’s two strategic priorities: Euro-Atlantic integration and interethnic relations. In meetings with citizens, Pendarovski outlined the core elements of his electoral program, which included a vision for a unified and European society, retaining young people within the country, dignified EU accession, fostering interethnic relations, and protecting the rights and freedoms of all citizens, especially marginalized groups. He also pledged to combat crime and corruption, uphold the rule of law, and implement vetting processes for judges, prosecutors, and politicians. Pendarovski noted that during his term, he had openly and impartially condemned mistakes, including those made by his own supporters.⁷⁰ Regarding his opponents, Pendarovski primarily focused on Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova and the supporting party, VMRO-DPMNE. In his speeches, he accused the opposition of persistently rejecting compromises that he believed were essential for preserving national dignity, including language and identity. He also criticized them for pursuing regressive policies that, in his view, led the country towards isolation rather than integration. Pendarovski further accused the opposition of being motivated solely by power and financial gain, and claimed that Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova failed to attend scheduled meetings and rallies with citizens.⁷¹ In addition to Pendarovski, SDSM leader Dimitar Kovachevski directed insults towards Siljanovska-Davkova, including remarks about her age,

68 “The Mol will file two criminal charges related to the elections, the prosecution has no criminal charges. Radio Free Europe, 24.04.2024.” Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32919352.html> (last visit 4 June 2024).

69 “Ministry of Internal Affairs: The elections were conducted in a fair, democratic, and free atmosphere, possibly the most peaceful thus far from a security perspective.” Kanal 5, 8.5.2024. Accessed at: <https://kanal5.com.mk/mvr-izborite-pominaa-vo-fer-demokratska-i-slobodna-atmosfera-mozhebi-najmirni-dosega/a639264> (last visited: 9 September 2024).

70 “Pendarovski announced vetting for judges, prosecutors and politicians: They should be dismissed from office and [put] in prison.” 4news, 05.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://4news.mk/pendarovski-najavi-veting-zadui-obviniteli-i-politichari-treba-da-bidat-razresheni-od-funktsiite-i-vo-zatvor/> (last visit: 6 June 2024)

71 “Siljanovska fails to attend scheduled rallies and meetings with citizens, a day or two ago she was announced, but failed to attend,” says Pendarovski. Libertas, 10 April 2024. Accessed at: <https://libertas.mk/sil-anovska-ne-odi-na-zakazhani-mitinzii-i-sredbi> (last visit: 5 June 2024).

and suggested that VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski needed to “guide” Siljanovska-Davkova during meetings with citizens. During Pendarovski’s rally in Kumanovo, a citizen made sexist remarks about Siljanovska-Davkova, prompting VMRO-DPMNE to demand an apology and condemn the lack of response from Pendarovski and SDSM. Subsequently, Elizabeta Gjorgievska, Pendarovski’s wife, along with representatives from the election headquarters, publicly denounced the insult.⁷² Pendarovski also emphasized that his campaign was intended to represent all citizens, contrasting it with the approach of his opponents, who he accused of seeking support exclusively from their respective ethnic communities.⁷³

VMRO-DPMNE-supported presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova campaigned under the slogan “Macedonia Proud Again”, symbolizing her vision of a nation restored to its former pride.⁷⁴ Gordana Siljanovska Davkova initially presented her election program at a press conference, highlighting the severe crisis facing the state and the erosion of national values. She emphasized the need for comprehensive reforms. The core elements of Siljanovska Davkova’s program included restoring the pride and dignity of the citizens, re-establishing national offices created by former President Gjorgje Ivanov, increasing her engagement in the legislature, and appointing professional staff and career diplomats. She also expressed strong opposition to DUI’s proposal for electing the president in Parliament, arguing that this could lead to a non-transparent election process dominated by party leaders. Siljanovska Davkova asserted that the president should derive legitimacy directly from the citizens. Additionally, she pledged to use the presidential veto to block bills she deemed detrimental. During meetings with citizens, Siljanovska Davkova outlined her vision for the country as one that is proud, lawful, European, stable, and orderly, where all citizens are equal and united in diversity. She also emphasized that both she and the party supporting her are committed to the European Union and uphold European values.⁷⁵ Regarding constitutional changes, Siljanovska-Davkova stated during the campaign that such changes had not been made previously due to the country’s situation. She emphasized that any proposed constitutional amendments should be

72 “Condemnations and accusations of insults in the presidential campaign”. Deutsche Welle, 15 April 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.dw.com/mk/osudi-i-obvinuvana-za-navredi-vo-pretsedatelskata-kampana/a-68824772> (last visit: 5 June 2024).

73 “Pendarovski from Ohrid: I believe that a massive number of citizens support the concept I advocate.” 360 Degrees, 27.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/pendarovski-od-ohrid-veruvam-deka-ogromen-broj-gragani-go-poddrzhuvaat-kontseptot-za-koj-se-zalagam/> (last visit: 5 June 2024).

74 Rebirth of the Nation: Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova presented the slogan “Macedonia Proud Again”. Leader, 29.03.2024. Accessed at: <https://lider.mk/preroduvanje-na-nacijata-gordana-siljanovska-davkova> (last visit: 5 June 2024).

75 “Siljanovska Davkova: Expertise and competence can pull the country out of chaos.” Libertas, 10.4.2024. Accessed at: <https://libertas.mk/sil-anovska-davkova-struchnosta-i-kompetnosta-mozhat-da-a-izvadat-zemata-od-haos/> (last visited: 9 September 2024).

carefully considered.⁷⁶ In her speeches, Siljanovska Davkova frequently criticized the government and the president for failing to implement necessary reforms and for not fostering trust in public institutions. She argued that genuine leadership is built on self-confidence derived from the trust of the citizens. Siljanovska-Davkova also accused the government of involvement in crime and corruption. Concerning Stevo Pendarovski, she asserted that he had no achievements to boast about, accusing him and SDSM of undermining the national, cultural, and ethnic identity of the country during his term.⁷⁷ During the presidential campaign, VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski criticized Stevo Pendarovski, referring to him as a subordinate to Ali Ahmeti⁷⁸. He also accused SDSM and DUI of engaging in crime and corruption, rigging tenders, and selling the national identity.⁷⁹

Stevcho Jakimovski, the candidate supported by the coalition “Bravely for Macedonia”, conducted his presidential campaign under the slogan “Bravely for Macedonia”.⁸⁰ He advocated for the presidency to be held by an individual with political experience, dignity, and the resolve to resist any pressure regarding citizens’ interests. Prior to the campaign’s start, Jakimovski was blacklisted by the United States due to his involvement in high-level corruption and abuse of office⁸¹. The blacklist did not deter Jakimovski from continuing his candidacy. He remained committed to maintaining close relations with the United States, which he viewed as a strategic partner for the country.⁸² In his speeches, Jakimovski emphasized his commitment to foreign policy, specifically focusing on strengthening the country’s positions within NATO and advocating for increased respect from NATO, the United States, and the EU towards the country and its citizens.⁸³ He also announced that, as president, he would

76 “Siljanovska-Davkova: Constitutional changes are needed, but not for converting the preamble into a phone book.” 360 Stepni, 17.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepni.mk/siljanovska-davkova-ustavni-izmeni> (last visit: 5 June 2024).

77 “Siljanovska: The performance of the anthem takes longer than Pendarovski’s speeches because he has nothing to say”. Deneshen Vesnik, 10.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://denesen.mk/siljanovska-> (last visit: 5 June 2024).

78 “Mickoski: Macedonia does not need a president subordinate to Ali Ahmeti as Pendarovski, but a worthy president as Professor Siljanovska-Davkova.” Kurir, 17.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://kurir.mk/vesti/makedonija/mickoski> (last visit: 10 June 2024)

79 “Mickoski: Ahmeti, Grubi, Osmani, and the other hundreds of DUI officials have turned the state into their own personal fiefdom., on April 24, let’s put an end to the destruction of Macedonia.” Lider, 10.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://lider.mk/mickoski-ahmeti-grubi-osmani> (last visit: 10 June 2024)

80 “Stevcho Jakimovski started the presidential campaign in Tetovo”. Republika, 04.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://republika.mk/vesti/makedonija/stevcho-jakimovski> (last visit: 10 June 2024)

81 “The United States blacklisted Stevco Jakimovski and Katica Janeva for corruption.” Sakam da Kazam, 18.03.2024. Accessed at: <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/sad-gi-stavija-katitsa-i-stevcho-na-tsrna-lista> (last visit: 10 June 2024)

82 “Stevco Jakimovski: We should not give up the European path, but we are tired of the EU tricks”. Voice of America, 21.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://en.voanews.com/a/stevcho-jakimovski> (last visit: 10 June 2024)

83 “Jakimovski promises a foreign policy in three directions: Strengthening positions in NATO, the United States and the EU.” 24Vesti, 07.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://24.mk/details/jakimovski-vetuva-nadvoreshna-politika> (last visit: 10 June 2024)

advocate for changes in the delegation of members to the National Judicial Council, the Constitutional Court, and ambassadors, as well as for the renewal of relations with the diaspora. Additionally, he asserted that the Constitution should not be amended to include Bulgarians until all issues related to the country's EU membership were resolved.⁸⁴

The candidate supported by the coalition "European Front", led by DUI's Bujar Osmani, campaigned under the slogan "European President." Osmani's campaign focused on advancing the European integration process, with a pledge to complete it within five years if elected as head of state. He highlighted his experience as Minister of Foreign Affairs, during which he initiated the negotiation process with the European Union. Alongside European integration, Osmani committed to maintaining a strong partnership with the United States, implementing full vetting processes, establishing an economic framework agreement, and promoting quality education.⁸⁵ At citizen meetings, Osmani highlighted that his support came from a multiethnic bloc dedicated to preserving harmony and coexistence within the country, as well as fostering good neighborly relations.⁸⁶ Osmani also urged the prompt implementation of constitutional changes as a crucial step for the country's progress. Concerning his opponents, he frequently targeted Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, referring to her as an advocate of isolation and challenging her to a debate to justify why isolation would be preferable.

Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska, supported by the political party Levica, campaigned under the motto "We Restore the Dignity of the Nation". Her platform focused on eliminating ethnic tribalism, a quota-based society, and discrimination, aiming to address the concerns of Macedonians who feel marginalized. In her speeches, she pledged to serve as president for all citizens, with a particular emphasis on supporting disadvantaged individuals based on class.⁸⁷ In her program, Vankovska Cvetkovska emphasized several key topics: ensuring citizen equality, encouraging the return of young people to the country, and pursuing a multivectoral foreign policy that engages with all global regions, not solely the West, while focusing on international solidarity, particularly with the oppressed. She also pledged to cancel three agreements that she believes are detrimental to the country: the

84 "The candidates promised an honest and interesting battle for president." Deutsche Welle, 04.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.dw.com/mk/kampanata> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

85 "Osmani: As president, I can achieve full European integration in the next 5 years." 360 Stepeni, 15.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/osmani> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

86 "Osmani launched the campaign for the country's first European president." Focus, 04.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://fokus.mk/osmani-ja-zapocna-kampanata> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

87 "Vankovska: I will be the president of all citizens". Republika, 04.04.2024 Accessed at: <https://republika.mk/vesti/makedonija/vankovska-ke-bidam-pretседател-na-site-gragan/> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

Ohrid Framework Agreement, the Prespa Agreement, and the Treaty on Good Neighborliness with Bulgaria.⁸⁸ Vankovska Cvetkovska's campaign also proposed the adoption of a completely new constitution, arguing that the current one fosters ethno-nationalist divisions. She emphasized her opposition to incorporating Bulgarians into the Constitution and criticized the proposed constitutional changes as a misleading tactic regarding the country's EU accession.⁸⁹ Vankovska further stated her support for European integration, though she perceived the EU as a militarized, socially unstable, and non-peaceful entity, akin to a branch of NATO. She emphasized her well-known anti-NATO stance, which had been evident even before the election campaign.⁹⁰ Regarding her opponents, Vankovska Cvetkovska indirectly addressed Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, who campaigned on restoring citizen pride. Vankovska Cvetkovska countered this concept by arguing that the focus should first be on discussing dignity before invoking pride.

Arben Taravari campaigned under the slogan "Taravari for President". The election platform of the presidential candidate supported by the "VLEN/VREDI" coalition was built on four key pillars: establishing North Macedonia as a legal and consensual state, integrating it within the region and Europe, and positioning it as a generator of security.⁹¹ During the campaign, Taravari emphasized that European integration is the only path to stability and sustainable development. He pledged to enhance and deepen cooperation with regional countries, including recognizing Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state. Taravari highlighted the indispensable strategic partnership with the United States, NATO, and the EU, while viewing Russia as a regional threat. He vowed that, if elected president, he would seek assurances that no additional preconditions for EU membership would be imposed after the constitutional changes. Additionally, Taravari committed to addressing the "de-Yugoslavization" of the Army and the Intelligence Agency and called for an immediate withdrawal from the Open Balkans initiative. He also promised to implement a minimum salary of 800 euros to counteract migration.⁹² Regarding his opponents, Taravari was particularly focused on Bujar Osmani, accusing him of being a candidate aligned with Russian

88 "Video) Presentation of the presidential program of Prof. Vankovska on Macedonian Television." Levica, 15.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://levica.mk/pres-centar/izjavi-i-komentari/pretstavuvanje> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

89 "I have a plan for an entirely new constitution," Vankovska said in Ohrid. 360 Stepeni, 13.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/imam-plan-za-sosema-nov-ustav-reche-vankovska-vo-ohrid/> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

90 "Vankovska: I am for European integration, but on a completely different basis." Radio Free Europe, 13.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/vankovska-> (last visit: 11 June 2024)

91 "Taravari elaborated the presidential platform, based on 4 pillars." Nova Makedonija, 03.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/politika/taravari> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

92 "Taravari promised a minimum wage of up to 800 euros to prevent migration." 360 Stepeni, 18.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/taravari-veti-minimalna-plata-do-800-evra> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

and Serbian oligarchs⁹³ and accused him of involvement in corruption related to tenders.⁹⁴ Taravari also criticized Osmani for his role as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, accusing him of authoring a plan to de-escalate tensions in northern Kosovo that involved significant pressures on Kosovo, leading to its rejection by the Kosovo government. Additionally, at the outset of the election campaign, on the night of April 6-7 in Skopje, a billboard featuring Arben Taravari was set on fire. The coalition “VLEN/VREDI” attributed the incident to DUI, but DUI denied the accusation, with Bujar Osmani calling on the Albanian opposition to cease their negative campaigning.⁹⁵

The presidential candidate of the ZNAM Movement, Maksim Dimitrievski, competed under the slogan “Maximum for Macedonia”. He launched his campaign in Krusevo with the presentation of the “Manifesto for Macedonia”. Dimitrievski emphasized his commitment to accountability, responsibility, and transparency in public office to combat corruption. In terms of foreign policy, Dimitrievski advocated for national unity, EU membership, and the protection of national interests. He highlighted the importance of developing relations with neighboring countries and the broader regional community. During his rallies, Dimitrievski stressed the need for strengthened institutions and the protection of citizens. He expressed firm opposition to potential constitutional changes, specifically those related to removing the “language spoken by 20%” clause and altering the presidential election process, viewing these as threats to the foundations of the current system. Dimitrievski also addressed the Ohrid Framework Agreement, asserting its complete implementation. Throughout the campaign, he criticized the current state of the country, asserting that he would not support decisions that he believes are detrimental to citizens’ interests, citing the French agreement and recent amendments to the Criminal Code as examples of such decisions.⁹⁶ Regarding the other candidates, Dimitrievski condemned the chanting of “UCK” [Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës, or Kosovo Liberation Army] that occurred during a rally for Bujar Osmani, the presidential candidate from the European Front. Dimitrievski urged DUI leader Ali Ahmeti to refrain from actions that could further divide the country.⁹⁷

93 “Vredi: Bujar Osmani the candidate on the front of the Serbian and Russian oligarchs”. MakPress, 14.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://makpress.mk/Home/PostDetails?PostId=583244> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

94 “Vredi: Bujar Osmani is the supermaster of corruption in this country.” MakFax 15.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://makfax.com.mk/makedonija/worth-buyar-osmans> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

95 “Burning the Billboard – Taravari urges institutions to take action, Osmani denies his Party’s involvement.” TV21, 07.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://mk.tv21.tv/paleneto-na-bilbordot-taravari> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

96 “Dimitrievski will advocate for the de-partisation of the security and diplomatic sphere in the country”. Puls 24, 06.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://puls24.mk/Dimitrievski> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

97 “Dimitrievski: By chanting UCK in Skopje, the Greens from DUI revealed their true nature, shedding their lambskins.” Accessed at: <https://mkd.mk/dimitrievski-zelenite-od-dui-so-skandiranjeto-na-uchkvo-skopje-izlegoa-od-jagneshkite-kozhi-i-se-prikazhaa-vo-vistinskoto-svetlo/> (last visit: 12 June 2024)

Financing of Presidential Candidates⁹⁸

Presidential candidates are required to submit four financial reports in relation to their election campaign. According to the election calendar⁹⁹, the first report, detailing donations received during the first ten days of the campaign, was due on the 11th day of the campaign, 14 April. The second report, accounting for donations received up to one day before the second round of voting, was due by 7 May. The third report, detailing donations received thereafter, was due one day after the closure of the election transaction account. The fourth and final financial report, which includes a summary of total revenues, expenditures, and a detailed breakdown of campaign expenses, was to be submitted no later than 15 days after the closure of the transaction account, by 8 July.

All presidential candidates submitted their financial reports on donations received during the first ten days of the campaign within the mandated timeframe. The second report on received donations was submitted in a timely manner by candidates Stevo Pendarovski, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, and Stevcho Jakimovski. Maksim Dimitrievski submitted the report several days after the prescribed deadline, while the remaining candidates, Bujar Osmani, Arben Taravari, and Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska, failed to submit the second financial report. The third financial report was submitted by all candidates with the exception of Arben Taravari and Maksim Dimitrievski. All candidates are required to submit the final financial report no later than 15 days after the closure of their transaction accounts, to the State Election Commission, the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, and the State Audit Office. This report was submitted by all presidential candidates; however, only Stevo Pendarovski and Stevco Jakimovski did so within the stipulated timeframe. Regarding the financing of the election campaign, participants were authorized to expend up to MKD 110 per registered voter on the voter list, totaling MKD 199,574,870. If the campaign organizer collected more funds than were expended, they were mandated to allocate the surplus to charitable purposes.

In this presidential election, six out of seven candidates utilized the entirety of the funds raised for their election campaigns with the exception of the candidate Maksim Dimitrievski, who exceeded the collected revenues.

⁹⁸ Financial statements of the presidential candidates are available on the websites of the State Election Commission (<https://www.sec.mk/pretsedatelski-izbori-2024/#tab-id-21>), the State Audit Office (<https://dzt.mk/mk/izbori/pretsedatelski-izbori>) and the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (<https://dksk.mk/mk/presidential-election-2024/>)

⁹⁹ Election Calendar for the election of President of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2024 consolidated text, State Election Commission. Accessed at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ErSGaORcYXYtLvmlqXsYyX1ThkcK6jNi/view> (last visit: 20.8.2024)

According to the submitted financial reports, the candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova conducted the most expensive election campaign, with expenditures totaling MKD 164,839,182 (EUR 2,680,311¹⁰⁰) by the end of the campaign. By 24 June, Davkova had raised an amount equivalent to her expenditures, specifically MKD 164,839,182 (EUR 2,680,311).

Following Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, the candidate Stevo Pendarovski incurred the second highest campaign expenditures, totaling MKD 162,774,917 (EUR 2,646,747). Pendarovski also raised an equivalent amount to finance his campaign.

The third highest expenditure was incurred by the presidential candidate, Bujar Osmani, having collected and spent MKD 54,373,771 (EUR 884,126) by the end of the election campaign.

Candidate Arben Taravari's fundraising and expenditure were equal, with a total of MKD 48,668,681 (EUR 791,361) raised and spent from the start of the campaign until 24 June.

According to the submitted financial reports, the candidate Stevcho Jakimovski spent a total of MKD 9,974,688 (EUR 162,190) during the campaign and raised an equivalent amount to finance the campaign.

Candidate Maksim Dimitrievski expended a total of MKD 9,897,805 (EUR 160,940) and raised MKD 7,992,676 (EUR 129,962). This results in Dimitrievski spending MKD 1,905,129 (EUR 30,978) more than the amount raised during the election campaign.

Among all seven candidates, Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska incurred the lowest campaign expenditures. From the beginning to the end of the election campaign, she raised and spent a total of MKD 9,894,076 (EUR 160,879).

Financial Reports of Participants in Presidential Election ¹⁰¹		
	Total Revenue	Total Expenditure
Gordana Siljanovska Davkova	164,839,182	164,839,182
Stevo Pendarovski	162,774,917	162,774,917
Bujar Osmani	54,373,771	54,373,771

100 The calculations in EUR were made at an average exchange rate of 61.5.

101 The review of the financial statements was conducted based on the reports submitted by the campaign organizers to the relevant state authorities as of 30 July, 2024.

Arben Taravari	48,668,681	48,668,681
Stevcho Jakimovski	9,974,688	9,974,688
Maksim Dimitrievski	7,992,676	9,897,805
Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska	9,894,076	9,894,076

Media

The media landscape is diverse, with 40 television and 58 radio stations, 22 print media outlets, and over 200 online portals. Although television is the main source of information, online portals have had an increasingly significant influence on the media environment, in particular during elections.

Apart from the legal obligation of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services to oversee media reporting during elections, monitoring of media reporting during the presidential campaign was also carried out by the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission.

The OSCE/ODIHR¹⁰² report on both the presidential and parliamentary elections notes that extensive and pluralistic coverage of the campaign in the media gave voters the opportunity to make an informed choice, but negative rhetoric and nationalist slogans marred an otherwise stable pre-election period.

The report finds that the Electoral Code was amended through expedited processes lacking transparency and public consultation, which is not in line with international standards and OSCE commitments. The International Election Observation Mission stated that a number of key ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed, including those to systematically revise the Electoral Code, to ensure equal access to the media in election campaigns and to increase accountability and integrity of campaign financing.

The report on the first round of presidential elections¹⁰³ notes that the election process was competitive and voters had the opportunity to make an informed

¹⁰² OSCE/ODIHR STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS - Parliamentary elections and second round of presidential elections, 8 May 2024. Available at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/8/568321.pdf> (last visit: 11.6.2024).

¹⁰³ OSCE/ODIHR STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS – Presidential elections first round, 24 April 2024. Available at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/2/567349.pdf> (last visit: 11.6.2024).

choice. According to the observation mission, the linking of the allocation of campaign funds and media opportunities to party affiliation disproportionately favored candidates associated with major political parties.

The Mission concludes that the campaigns for the two election cycles were competitive and the fundamental freedoms were respected. However, they emphasize that the tone of the campaign for the presidential election, including online, became increasingly negative, with *ad hominem* attacks and occasional threats, and it remained so in both the parliamentary and presidential campaigns. Instances of discriminatory rhetoric were observed throughout the campaign, and in some cases conflating the perceived actions of political parties with ethnic communities.

To showcase examples, the Observation Mission states that on April 7, *the Levica's* Facebook account shared a message stating that “it is time to put an end to the influence of the DUI-zation and the Albanization of Macedonia. During the campaign period, *Levica* made several derogatory comments against Bulgaria, Bulgarians and the EU. On 18 April, on the Facebook account of the leader of *Levica*, the following message was posted: “Bulgarians in the Constitution is a treason, today begins the Bulgarian fascist occupation of Macedonia”. Politicians from BDI/DUI also publicly voiced interpretations that VMRO-DPMNE's slogan “Make Macedonia Yours” is chauvinistic and anti-Albanian.

By law, up to 90 per cent of the budgetary funds earmarked for campaigning, airtime, billboards, and poster space were allocated to the four major parliamentary parties, namely, SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, BDI/DUI, and Besa. The OSCE/ODIHR notes that the legal framework lacks provisions on the application of campaign regulations in cases where presidential and parliamentary elections are held concurrently, leading to instances of appropriation of the presidential campaign period for promoting parliamentary candidates.

The ODIHR EOM media monitoring results show that the election-related coverage in broadcast media during the campaign period was overall balanced and neutral in tone.

The OSCE/ODIHR final report notes that whereas most broadcasters allocated time to the two presidential contestants in the run-off equally, private broadcaster *Alfa TV* dedicated most coverage to the candidate endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE (68 per cent). Online news portals *Kurir.mk* and *Tetovasot.com* focused on candidates

endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE (64 per cent) and BDI/DUI (47 per cent) respectively, while *Lajmpress.org* covered the candidate endorsed by VLEN most extensively (40 per cent), mainly with a positive tone.

In the period from 4 to 22 April 2024, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services¹⁰⁴ monitored the broadcasters' coverage of the election campaign for the first round of presidential elections, and included 13 broadcasters – the national commercial televisions Alsat-M, Alpha, Kanal 5, Sitel, Telma, 24 Vesti, 21-M, Shenja, Klan Macedonia and Sonce and the program channels of the public broadcaster – MRT 1, MRT 2 and the Parliamentary Channel.

The monitoring findings show that almost all TV stations respected the equal treatment principle in the electoral media coverage of presidential candidates in their newscasts. The exception is TV 21-M, with an editorial decision not to report in the newscast on Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska, a candidate endorsed by the Levica party¹⁰⁵.

All TV stations singled out the presidential campaign activities in a special news program and reported on the main points that candidates highlighted when addressing the voters. Only the First Program Service of the Macedonian Radio Television and TV 24 Vesti interviewed all seven presidential candidates in the country. Regarding the presidential debates, only MRT 1 organized one joint televised debate featuring all seven candidates.

With the exception of TV Klan Macedonia, which, contrary to the Electoral Code, did not provide information on the electoral process in a format accessible to persons with disabilities, all program services covered by the monitoring provided a daily edition of the central TV news and a weekly edition of a news program with subtitling or translation into sign language for persons with sensory disabilities.

104 Election media coverage in the first round of the election campaign - from 4 to 22 April - Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services Available at <https://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/report-presidential-2024-first-round-final-1.pdf> (last visit: 11.6.2024).

105 The media outlet in a letter addressed to the AAVMS stated that the editorial board took the decision because, as they say, the presidential candidate of the Levica Party promoted values which are not in line with the editorial policy of TV 21-M, such as “revoking the recognition of Kosovo as independent and sovereign state, exiting NATO membership, termination of the Prespa Agreement, revision of the Ohrid Framework Agreement that ended the military conflict in the country, and so on.”

Monitoring of the public broadcaster

According to the information available in the AAVMS report on the first round of the presidential elections, almost equal time was dedicated to the activities of the ruling and oppositional parliamentary parties based on analysis of 19 editions of Newscast 2, that is, 2 hours and 23 minutes for the ruling and 2 hours and 27 minutes for the oppositional parties. The time dedicated to the activities of the ruling parties also includes the time dedicated to the two presidential candidates: Stevo Pendarovski and Bujar Osmani, supported by the coalitions of the two ruling parties, SDSM and DUI. According to AAVMS, this was in part result of the overlapping of the end of the presidential campaign for the first round with the start of the parliamentary elections campaign.

The time for the activities of the parliamentary oppositional parties was allocated to the four presidential candidates: Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, Arben Taravari, Stevco Jakimovski and Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska, as well as the activities of the coalitions and the parties supporting them - the Coalition Tvoja Makedonija - VMRO-DPMNE, the Coalition Vlen, the Coalition Hrabro za Makedonija and the party Levica. A total of 38 minutes were allocated for the activities of the non-parliamentary parties, or specifically for the presidential candidate Maksim Dimitrievski and the Movement ZNAM – Za nasa Makedonija.

The first program service of the Macedonian Radio Television (MRT 1) during the first round of the presidential election campaign, from 4 to 22 April, aired a debate with the seven presidential candidates in the country, as well as debate shows with participants both from ruling and oppositional parties, complying with the obligation from the Electoral Code. The first program service of the public broadcaster also aired interviews with all seven presidential candidates, pursuing the rules for fair, balanced and impartial reporting.

The second program service allocated almost equal time of 1 hour to the candidate Bujar Osmani, supported by DUI-led Coalition European Front, and Stevo Pendarovski, supported by the ruling SDSM-led Coalition for European Future. All presidential candidates supported by opposition parties were given about the same time. Arben Taravari supported by the oppositional Coalition Vlen was given 31 minutes and 8 seconds; Stevcho Jakimovski, the leader of the party GROM and the Coalition Hrabro za Makedonija - 30 minutes and 39 seconds; Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska supported by the party Levica - 29 minutes and 40 seconds and Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, supported by the opposition VMRO-DPMNE led Coalition Tvoja Makedonija

-29 minutes and 31 seconds. Maksim Dimitrievski, the leader of ZNAM, as the only represented non-parliamentary party was given 26 minutes in the media coverage.

According to the monitoring report on the second round of the election campaign¹⁰⁶ from 25 April to 6 May - the Macedonian television allocated almost equal time for the activities of the ruling and opposition parties - 1 hour and 45 minutes for the ruling and 1 hour and 49 minutes for the opposition parties. Since the parliamentary elections campaign was held concurrently with the campaign for the second round of presidential elections, the time for the activities of the ruling parties (1 hour and 45 minutes) includes the time allocated for the electoral promotions of the presidential candidate Stevo Pendarovski, who run in the second round, as well as the time for the activities of the participating coalitions in the parliamentary elections, DUI-led European Front and SDSM-led European Future.

The time for the activities of the parliamentary opposition parties (1 hour and 49 minutes) consists of the electoral promotions of the presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova who run in the second round, as well as the activities of the coalitions and parties that participated in the race for the parliamentary elections: the Coalition Tvoja Makedonija - VMRO-DPMNE; Coalition VLEN, Coalition Hrabro za Makedonia and the Party Levica.

The approach of the news editor of MRT 2 - the Second Program Service of the Macedonian Radio Television, led to a visible deviation from the legal principle of equality in the coverage of the electoral activities of the two presidential candidates in the newscasts: 21 minutes and 20 seconds were allocated for the campaign of the ruling SDSM candidate, Stevo Pendarovski, and 9 minutes and 7 seconds for the opposition VMRO-DPMNE candidate, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova.

The reason was that the program content that comprises one third (30%) which is dedicated to the parliamentary opposition (total – 1 hour 47 minutes 7 seconds), in addition to the time allocated to Siljanovska-Davkova, it had to include program content for the coalitions “Tvoja Makedonija” (VMRO-DPMNE); VLEN; Hrabro za Makedonia (GROM), and the party Levica. On the other hand, in the one third (30%) of the program content that was aimed for the ruling parties (total – 1 hour 52 minutes), in addition to the reporting on the campaign of Pendarovski, it had to include program content about the campaign of the coalitions: European Future (SDSM) and European Front (DUI). To compare, these “thirds of program content” –

¹⁰⁶ Election media presentation in the second round of the election campaign - from 25 April to 6 May – Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Available at <https://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/report-presidential-2024-first-round-final-1.pdf> (last visit: 11.6.2024).

both for the opposition and the ruling parties – have more or less the same duration, which necessarily led to different time allocated to the two presidential candidates.

Monitoring of commercial media

According to the AAVMS report and the overall coverage of the political entities in the informative programs for the first elections round (period from 4 to 22 April), it can be noted that private televisions had largely reported in balanced way for the candidates Stevo Pendarovski (3 hours, 2 minutes and 20 seconds) and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova (2 hours, 58 minutes and 28 seconds). A little less was reported about the candidates Bujar Osmani (2 hours, 48 minutes and 21 seconds) and Arben Taravari (2 hours, 30 minutes and 56 seconds), then Maksim Dimitrievski (2 hours, 10 minutes and 12 seconds), and least about Biljana Vankovska – Cvetkovska (1 hour, 50 minutes and 48 seconds).

Table 1: Coverage in informative programs of private broadcasters
Source: Report on electoral media coverage in the first round of election campaign - AAVMS

First round	TV Alsot	TV Alfa	TV Kanal 5	TV Sitel	TV Telma	TV24	TV Sonce	TV Klan	TV 21-M	TV Shenja	Total
Stevo Pendarovski	0:13:24	0:17:55	0:20:14	0:17:00	0:24:30	0:18:34	0:13:04	0:16:40	0:20:25	0:20:34	3:02:20
Gordana Siljanovska Davkova	0:11:54	0:18:31	0:18:41	0:16:38	0:27:32	0:19:05	0:14:15	0:13:02	0:20:53	0:17:57	2:58:28
Bujar Osmani	0:13:38	0:11:53	0:11:07	0:11:52	0:23:28	0:14:00	0:11:15	0:20:23	0:26:52	0:23:53	2:48:21
Arben Taravari	0:13:06	0:12:34	0:15:59	0:10:21	0:18:48	0:14:00	0:13:43	0:15:22	0:15:59	0:21:04	2:30:56
Maksim Dimitrievski	0:11:07	0:13:13	0:14:22	0:10:36	0:18:08	0:18:13	0:08:39	0:10:39	0:17:37	0:07:38	2:10:12
Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska	0:12:14	0:12:01	0:11:48	0:11:47	0:23:07	0:14:16	0:04:59	0:12:20		0:08:16	1:50:48
Stevcho Jakimovski	0:11:08	0:12:19	0:14:50	0:11:24	0:19:25	0:13:51	0:11:42	0:11:42	0:13:45	0:06:09	2:06:15

According to the AAVMS report on the media coverage of the political entities in the informative programs for the second round (from April 25 to May 6) of the elections, it can be noted that private televisions largely reported in a balanced way for the candidates Stevo Pendarovski (1 hour, 23 minutes and 4 seconds) and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova (1 hour, 29 minutes and 51 seconds).

Table 2: Coverage in informative programs of private broadcasters
Source: Report on electoral media coverage in the first round of election campaign - AAVMS

Second round	TV Alsat	TV Alfa	TV Kanal 5	TV Sitel	TV Telma	TV24	TV Sonce	TV Klan	TV 21-M	TV Shenja	Total
Stevo Pendarovski	0:22:59	0:05:50	0:07:42	0:04:49	00:09:28	0:07:15	0:05:53	0:09:09	0:07:29	0:11:58	1:23:04
Gordana Siljanovska Davkova	0:21:48	0:05:56	0:07:28	0:03:57	0:07:51	0:07:30	0:04:52	0:09:29	0:07:53	0:13:07	1:29:51

Proceedings on Media Reporting Violations

AAVMS monitoring also includes the violations¹⁰⁷ of the Electoral Code by broadcasters. Violations have been observed in two broadcasters, TV Klan Macedonia and TV Alfa. TV Klan Macedonia committed two violations because it failed to report about the election process in a format accessible to persons with disabilities and because it violated the election silence on 23.04.2024 and 24.04.2024 by airing information and audiovisual materials related to or showing the contestants. TV Alpha on 25 April 2024, in the program aired from 08:00 - 09:00 o'clock, from 09:00 - 10:00, from 10:00 - 11:00, from 11:00 - 12:00 and from 12:00 - 13:00, aired over 4 minutes of paid political advertising for the presidential candidate – Gordana Siljanovska Davkova supported by the political party VMRO-DPMNE.

Presidential election results

Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, a candidate endorsed by VMRO-DPMNE and the coalition, received the biggest number of votes in both rounds and won the 2024 presidential elections. In the first round of the presidential elections, Siljanovska Davkova won the biggest number of votes - 363,085 or 40.08%, and Stevo Pendarovski, a candidate endorsed by SDSM and the coalition won 180,499 or 19.92% of the votes. None of the candidates won majority votes of all registered voters in the first round, that is, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova won 20.01%, and Pendarovski won 9.95% votes of the total number of registered voters in the Voter List, leading to a run-off voting.

The candidates supported by other parties, i.e. Bujar Osmani, supported by DUI, Maksim Dimitrievski supported by the Movement ZNAM, Arben Taravari supported

¹⁰⁷ Review of Misdemeanor Proceedings for presidential elections 2024 AAVMS, May, 2024. Available at: <https://avmu.mk/izbori-2024/> (last visit: 12.6.2024).

by the coalition VLEN, Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska supported by Levica and Stevce Jakimovski supported by GROM did not enter the second round. Bujar Osmani won 120,811 votes, i.e. 13.37%, Maksim Dimitrievski won 83,855 votes (9.26%), Arben Taravari won 83,337 votes (9.20%), Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska won 41,331 votes (4.56%), while Stevce Jakimovski won 8,121 or 0.90% of the votes, which is less votes than the required number of signatures to run the elections. In these elections, the number of invalid ballots was significant, i.e. 24,560 invalid ballots (2.7%). 905,622 citizens turned out to vote in the first round of presidential elections, which accounted for 49.93% of the 1,814,317 eligible voters.

First Round ¹⁰⁸	Registered voters	Voters who cast the vote	% of voters who cast the vote	% of registered voters
Total	1 814 317	905 971	0,00%	49.93%
Gordana Siljanovska Davkova		363 086	40.08%	20.01%
Stevo Pendarovski		180 500	19.92%	10%
Bujar Osmani		121 088	13.37%	6.67%
Maksim Dimitrievski		83 856	9.26%	4.70%
Arben Taravari		83 393	9.20	4.60%
Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska		41 331	4.56%	2.28%
Stevcho Jakimovski		8 121	0.90%	0.44%
Invalid ballots		24 560	2.70%	1.35%

In the run-off voting, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova won 561,000 or 65.14% of the votes, while Pendarovski won 251,899 or 29.25% of the votes. In the second round, 48,289 voters cast invalid ballots, which accounted for 5.6% of the votes. The total number of voters who cast their vote in the second round was 47.47%, i.e. 861,218 voters out of a total of 1,814,317 registered voters.

108 State Election Commission CONCLUSION on the final results of the voting for election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia held on 24.04.2024. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19p92UR04jpFuXlr7cQYGlxTRjwZaNHNy/view>, (last visit: 31.05.2024)

Second Round ¹⁰⁹	Gordana Siljanovska Davkova	Stevo Pendarovski	Invalid ballots	Total
Registered voters				1 814 317
Voters who cast the vote	561 000	251 899	48 289	812 899
% of voters who cast the vote	65.14%	29.25%	5,6%	100%
% of registered voters	30,9%	13,9%	2,7%	47.47%

The turnout at these presidential elections slightly increased, i.e. 47.47% of the total number of registered voters cast their vote, which is an increase of less than one percent compared to the 2019 presidential elections, when the turnout was 46.65%. Despite the minimal increase, these presidential elections are also indicative of the generally low interest of citizens to participate in the electoral process. While in the first presidential elections, held in 1994, 77.44% of voters cast their vote, in the elections held in 2014, 2019 and 2024, about thirty percent less voters cast their vote compared to the 1994 elections, namely 54.36% in 2014, 46.65% in 2019 and 47.47% in 2024. The debate on how to elect the president, whether through direct elections or at the Assembly, was reopened. Namely, the Albanian parties supported the second alternative, justifying it that it will pursue the ethnic equality and will prevent the ethnic outvoting by the Macedonian bloc, while all Macedonian parties were categorically against this idea, considering that the president is the highest official of the country and therefore should be elected at direct elections.¹¹⁰ Political entities from the Macedonian bloc supported the OSCE and the Venice Commission recommendation to remove the electoral threshold of 40%, in order to prevent political bargaining and initiatives to boycott the elections, which in the second presidential round were unofficially initiated by DUI.¹¹¹ The call for a boycott, although never officially confirmed by DUI, were reflected in the turnout. Namely, 137,645 less citizens voted in the presidential elections compared to

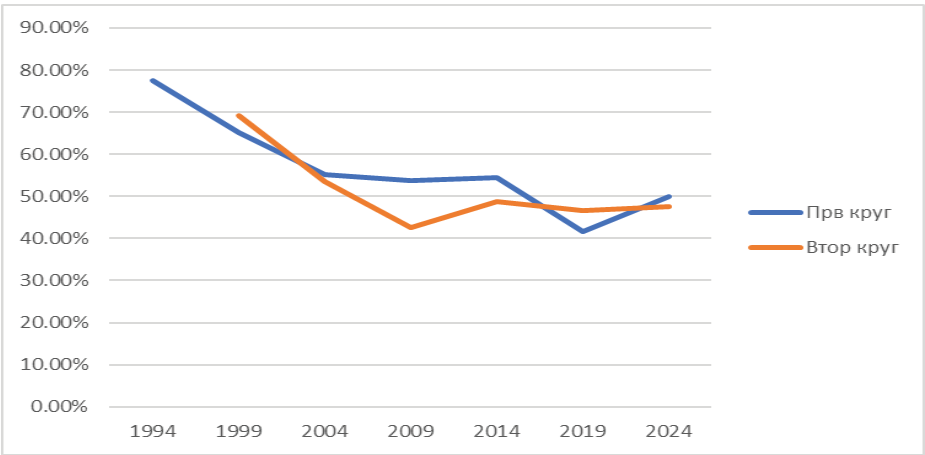
109 State Election Commission, CONCLUSION on the final results of the voting for election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 08.05.2024. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CD9ZULhaQBDXOCUIM7RBWUQRvAlcTtn/view> (last visit: 31.05.2024)

110 Unacceptable for VMRO-DPMNE, and considered as part of the campaign by SDSM – the idea of Ahmeti and Taravari to elect the President at the Assembly, TV 21. <https://mk.tv21.tv/za-vmro-dpmne-neprifativaza-sdsm-del-od-kampana-idejata-na-ahmeti-i-taravari-za-izbor-na-pretседatel-vo-sobranie/> (Last visit: 14 June 2024).

111 Siljanovska-Davkova: The recommendation to remove the electoral threshold of 40% in the second election round to be applied for the next elections. Sloboden pecat. <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/siljanovska-davkova-na-slednite-izbori-da-ja-primenime-preporakata-za-otstranuvanje-na-izborniot-prag-od-40-otsto-vo-vtoriot-izborni-krug/> (Last visit: 14.06.2024).

the parliamentary elections, mostly in electoral districts with dominant Albanian ethnic population.¹¹² Even though it was low, a turnout of 47.47% still exceeded the electoral threshold and the elections were declared successful.

Turnout at presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia from 1994 to 2024¹¹³



Safeguarding the right to vote

The protection of the right to vote is guaranteed by the Electoral Code. According to the Electoral Code, any candidate list submitter and any voter has the right to file a complaint with the State Election Commission if they believe their right has been violated. Complaints by list submitters may relate to the voting procedure, tabulation and determination of results, while voters may file a complaint if their voting rights were violated through the procedure. Proceedings to protect the right to vote are immediate, therefore, any complaint or legal action may not be filed by mailing post.

Candidate list submitters must file a complaint with the SEC within 48 hours after the voting ended, i.e. after initial results were released, while the SEC must take a decision within 48 hours after receiving the complaint. SEC must notify the complainant of its decision by e-mail, and the decision is deemed delivered within five hours after sending of the electronic correspondence. For a negative decision

¹¹² The presidential elections were boycotted by around 137,000 voters, just as DUI won votes in the parliamentary elections. 360 stepeni. <https://360stepeni.mk/infografik-pretседatelskite-izbori-gi-bojkotira-a-okolu-137-000-glasachi-isto-kolku-shto-dui-osvoi-glasovi-na-parlamentarnite/> (Last visit: 14.06.2024).

¹¹³ Website of the State Election Commission www.sec.mk

of the SEC, a complainant can file a lawsuit before the Administrative court within 24 hours after receiving the decision. The court must reach a decision within 48 hours of receiving the lawsuit. The Administrative Court may either confirm or reverse the decision of the SEC, whereby the decisions of the court are final, i.e. no appeal or another type of legal remedy can be used.¹¹⁴

In instances when the voter's right to vote is violated, a voter may file a complaint with the SEC within 24 hours, and the SEC must take a decision within 4 hours after receiving the complaint. The decision taken by the SEC may be appealed, by filing a lawsuit before the Administrative court within 24 hours after the receipt of the decision. When the deadlines run in parallel to the voting process, a voter who received a positive decision will be allowed to exercise their right to vote.¹¹⁵

For the presidential elections, citizens filed a total of 362 complaints with the State Election Commission regarding their right to vote, and 114 of the complaints remained unaddressed until the polls closed. SEC took decision about 248 complaints, whereby 136 complaints were endorsed and voters were enabled to exercise the right to vote, 71 complaints were dismissed on the merits, and 41 complaints were rejected.¹¹⁶

After the first round of the presidential elections on April 24, 2024, only one complaint on election procedure violation was filed before the State Election Commission by the presidential candidate of the Coalition VLEN, Arben Taravari, with allegations for electoral fraud during the election process at the polling station no. 1112/1 in Lipkovo. The complaint was dismissed by the SEC,¹¹⁷ and the decision was later appealed by the Coalition VLEN before the Administrative Court, which accepted the appeal within the stipulated deadline.¹¹⁸ At the ensuing sessions, the State Election Commission adopted three Decisions to cancel the voting and dismiss electoral board members in the polling stations 1090, 1100 and 1075 in

114 Handbook on presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia 2019, second supplemented edition. CAS and IDSCS, 2019, page 61-62. Accessed: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Belegexemplar_2019_The_Republic_of_Macedonia_s_2019_Presidential_Elections_Handbook_MKD.pdf (last visit: 03 June 2024)

115 Ibid.

116 OSCE, International Election Observation Mission - Republic of North Macedonia – Presidential Elections, 24 April 2024. Accessed: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/north-macedonia/567274> (last visit: 03 June 2024)

117 State Election Commission, "Decision on complaint UP1 09-5 filed for the protection of the right to vote by an authorized representative of candidate list submitter Arben Taravari", 30 April 2024. Accessed: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-Po2vwxigqMuBfOsjNWBzw87c0k5Ypv/view?usp=sharing> (last visit: 03 June 2024)

118 Vlen urged the competent institutions to act after the Administrative Court accepted their appeal for the voting in Lipkovo, 02 May 2024, Zoom.mk. Accessed at: <https://zoom.mk/vlen-gi-povika-nadlezhnite-institucii-da-postapat-otkako-upravniot-sud-%D1%98a-prifati-nivnata-zhalba-za-glasa%D1%9Aeto-vo-lipkovo/> (last visit: 03 June 2024)

Kumanovo, because of interrupted voting for more than 3 hours. As stated in the decision, the election process will not be repeated for the reason that the number of registered voters cannot affect the election results. Additionally, in accordance with the decision of the Administrative Court, the SEC dismissed the entire electoral board at polling station 1112/1 in Lipkovo.¹¹⁹

Given the specific situation with parliamentary and presidential elections held concurrently, and lacking provisions in the law on updating the Voter List between the two rounds of presidential elections, 1,148 citizens who became eligible to vote in the period between the two rounds were added to the Voter List and were able to vote only in the parliamentary, but not in the presidential elections.¹²⁰

The second round of voting, which was done concurrently with the election of MPs to the Macedonian Assembly, took place in a peaceful atmosphere. With the exception of numerous complaints filed about the administration of parliamentary elections in several polling stations, no complaints were filed with the SEC regarding the presidential elections.¹²¹

Observer Evaluations of the Electoral Process

The presidential elections were observed by a total of 1,543 observers in the first round and 2,163 observers in the second round. The State Election Commission (SEC) accredited 915 domestic and 628 international observers, as well as 38 international reporters to observe the first round of elections.¹²² The second round, held on 8 May, was observed by 1,303 domestic observers, 775 international observers, 85 translators, and 83 accredited international reporters.¹²³

The Association for Development of Societal and Social Innovations “WAKE UP” – Skopje deployed the largest number of domestic observers, 752 in the first round and 966 in the second round. Other accredited organizations included the Civic Association CIVIL – Center for Freedom – Skopje, Center for Security Research, Institute for Economic Strategies and International Relations, Association for

119 State Election Commission, “Decisions for cancelled voting/dismissal of the electoral board. Accessed at: <https://www.sec.mk/pretsedatelski-izbori-2024/#tab-id-10> (last visit: 03 June 2024)

120 OSCE (24 April 2024)

121 “SES: So far, 17 complaints about the parliamentary elections, but no complaints for presidential elections”, 10 May 2024, Radio Free Europe. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32941549.html> (last visit: 03 June 2024)

122 SEC Announcement – 24.04.2024 <https://www.sec.mk/soopshenie-23/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

123 Table of Accredited Observers for the Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia, 08.05.2024 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vdVSlgdcRhBkij33gjxPYpm6VrqXRIPU/view> (last visit: 2 July 2024)

Promotion and Development of Inclusive Society Inklusiva Kumanovo, Roma Democracy Foundation – Skopje, National Roma Center – Kumanovo, and Macedonian Center for Cultural Development.

OSCE/ODIHR deployed the largest international election observation mission, fielding a total of 234 observers from 33 countries in the first round, including 216 experts, long-term and short-term observers, and 18 observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – ad hoc committee for observing the presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia PACE¹²⁴. The second round of presidential elections, held simultaneously with the parliamentary elections, was observed by 411 observers, 14 experts, and 31 translators.

The elections were also observed by the European Parliament, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Washington D.C. – branch of the Republic of North Macedonia, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy Silba, Delegation of ECAP – Kosovo, Center for Development of Election Systems, Reforms and Training (training center) of the Central Election Commission of Georgia, Center for Continuous Training in Elections, Moldova, and the European Association for Dialogue and Democracy – Bergen, Norway.

The U.S. Embassy observed with 69 observers, while the embassies of the Netherlands, Hungary, Albania, and Slovakia sent fewer observers. The State Election Commissions of Kosovo, Montenegro, and Ukraine also deployed observers in the field.

The presidential elections were observed by a total of 58 international reporters in the first round and 83 reporters in the second round, representing regional and international media and news agencies, including Al Jazeera Balkans, TRT Balkans, TV N1 Serbia, Austrian Radio Television, Bulgarian National Television, Prva TV Serbia, ZDF Germany, ADR Germany, Klan Kosova, Radio Television Kosovo, TRT (Public Service of the Republic of Turkey), TV Imedi, Euronews Serbia, Euronews Albania, Top Channel Albania – Kosovo branch, Agence France-Presse, Reuters, Associated Press, Western Balkans Office – Agence France-Presse, ABC News Albania, Kosovo Press Information Agency, Albanian Service of Voice of America, Bulgarian News Agency, Voice of America – Macedonian editorial, and European Press Photo Agency – EPA.

¹²⁴ International observers state the Presidential Elections in North Macedonia were competitive and overall well run, but marred by legal gaps and negative rhetoric, <https://www.osce.org/mk/odihr/elections/north-macedonia/567286> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

In its preliminary report for the second round of presidential elections and parliamentary elections, the OSCE/ODIHR International Observation Mission assessed that the presidential elections were competitive and fundamental freedoms were respected, although the process remains insufficiently regulated.¹²⁵ The observation mission assessed that the elections were overall well conducted in the first round, and voters had the opportunity to make an informed choice, noting however that the presidential elections were marked by legal gaps and negative rhetoric.¹²⁶

Both reports largely highlighted ambiguities in the legal framework, particularly the shortcomings in the Electoral Code and its swift amendments without public debate.

The report further notes that the legal framework establishes the basis for holding democratic elections but fails to regulate important elements of the presidential race, while recent amendments lacked transparency and public consultation. Key aspects, such as campaign rules, access to the media, and the distribution of state funding, are not regulated, undermining legal certainty. The Mission noted these deficiencies led state authorities to use rules intended for political parties, factoring the representation of political parties in the parliament and favoring candidates from major parliamentary parties.

The report also noted that the latest amendments to the Electoral Code were made after the elections were announced. Although the changes incorporated some previous ODIHR recommendations and technical proposals from the SEC for voter registration, campaign financing, and resolution of election disputes, recommendations from the inter-institutional working group responsible for electoral reforms were largely ignored, and several recommendations from ODIHR and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe were not considered. Additionally, it assessed that the amendments were adopted through expedited processes lacking public consultation, which is not in line with international standards and OSCE commitments.

OSCE/ODIHR assessed the presidential election campaign as competitive with respect for fundamental freedoms. However, it noted that as the Election Day

125 North Macedonia, Parliamentary Elections and Presidential Election - Second Round, 8 May 2024: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/north-macedonia/568270> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

126 North Macedonia, Presidential Election, 24 April 2024: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/north-macedonia/567274> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

approached, and overlapping with the parliamentary election campaign, the rhetoric became increasingly negative and, in some cases, discriminatory. The Mission also assessed that the regulation for access to campaign venues, media, and political party financing gives an advantage to the four largest parliamentary political parties over other candidates.

Election days were overall positively assessed, with procedures for voting largely respected, although in some cases, during the counting, electoral boards did not fully complete the prescribed procedures. Observers positively assessed voting procedures in the vast majority of the 1,340 polling stations observed. However, the report highlights some instances of group and family voting, and in some cases, while not against the law, tracking of voters. Observers noted that the legal requirement for electoral boards to inform voters about voting procedures, which is important to reduce the number of invalid ballots, was not followed in almost half of the polling stations.

Reports also noted the insufficient representation of women in the campaign, and the limited engagement with female voters showed a need for greater commitment to ensuring their involvement in political life. In this context, it was highlighted that political parties, with the notable exception of one female presidential candidate, had few female speakers at campaign events, and issues related to gender equality were largely neglected in the campaign discourse.

OSCE/ODIHR assessed the media environment as generally free. The mission found that there were several televised debates involving candidates from the major coalitions of the parliamentary elections, as well as three debates between the two candidates in the second round of the presidential elections, contributing to the ability of voters to make an informed choice. Media monitoring of the first round of presidential elections showed that the public broadcasting service covered all presidential candidates in accordance with legal provisions, establishing a framework for allocating time to political parties in the elections, and private media provided adequate information about all candidates overall, with some channels favoring specific candidate lists. Observers noted that there was one joint televised debate featuring all seven candidates. However, the OSCE/ODIHR report for the second round highlights the need for further reforms in the media sector to improve media sustainability, regulate online media, and further align the legal framework with EU legislation.

OSCE/ODIHR assessed that the legal framework does not sufficiently ensure access to legal redress. In practice, the SEC failed to provide effective legal remedy for complaints

submitted on the 24 April Election Day, leaving approximately half unresolved by the close of the polls. Furthermore, the majority of its decisions on complaints available for OSCE/ODIHR review failed to provide the reasoning, and many decisions referenced outdated legal acts and incorrect legal remedies for appeals. The Administrative Court complied with the short deadlines for deciding on appeals. The Constitutional Court failed to review in a timely manner the two election-related petitions: one challenging the guidelines of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS) on the distribution of media airtime among presidential candidates, and another questioning the constitutionality of the Electoral Code with respect to campaign conditions for candidates nominated by group of voters, without affiliation to political parties, which appellants claimed were discriminatory. The Constitutional Court did not review the petitions in a timely manner; one was reviewed and rejected after the challenged provisions had already been implemented, while the second one remained undecided prior to the 8 May election day, which the Court attributed to the lack of expedited deadlines for constitutional review.

In its preliminary short-term election observation report, the domestic observer Civic Association CIVIL – Center for Freedom reported that the 8 May second round of presidential and parliamentary elections proceeded peacefully and democratically, without incidents or major irregularities. This assessment indicated that citizens had the opportunity to freely express their electoral will in accordance with the Electoral Code and democratic principles and standards.¹²⁷ In the preliminary report for the first round of presidential elections, CIVIL observed a peaceful election day with high turnout and fair electoral contest. The report noted that institutions ensured fair electoral process, allowing citizens to vote freely. Political parties and presidential candidates were able to freely present their programs and concepts to the public, and the media faced no obstacles in reporting. However, CIVIL identified more serious violations in the first round, including cases where election administration officials suggested or influenced voters' choices and several breaches of the secrecy of the vote and infringement of the right to vote.¹²⁸

CIVIL highlighted certain incidents at polling stations that marred the second round of Election Day, noting that some electoral board members were inadequately trained and engaged in political campaigning and influencing voters.

127 Derala: Election day proceeded in a peaceful and democratic atmosphere, but with several types of irregularities - <https://civilmedia.mk/derala-izborniot-den-mina-vo-mirna-i-demokratska-atmosfera-no-so-poveke-vidovi-na-neregularnosti/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

128 Preliminary Report by CIVIL on the Presidential Elections: Peaceful election day, with democratic and fair electoral contest - <https://civilmedia.mk/preliminaren-izveshtaj-na-tsvil-za-pretседатelskite-izbori-miren-izboren-den-demokratski-i-fer-izboren-natprevar/> (last visit: 2 June 2024)

Additionally, it was observed that election board members, depending on their political affiliation, either supported or attempted to hinder the boycott of the presidential elections at polling stations monitored by CIVIL observers.

CIVIL also reported insufficient voter awareness of the voting procedures for the presidential and parliamentary elections, exacerbated by the electoral boards' lack of procedural knowledge. In this context, it was noted that around 50 citizens called to express confusion about whether electoral boards were permitted to ask voters if they intended to take one or two ballots. CIVIL concluded that this indicates that procedures and voting rights were not adequately explained during the preparatory period, specifically in the State Election Commission's voter education campaign.

In a joint statement, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi, acknowledged that according to the preliminary findings of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) the presidential and parliamentary elections held on 8 May were conducted in a peaceful and democratic atmosphere. They further noted that the elections were competitive and respected fundamental freedoms, but highlighted that the electoral process remains insufficiently regulated.¹²⁹

129 Constitutional amendments, a puzzle in the post-election statement by Borrell and Varhelyi in North Macedonia, <https://360stepeni.mk/ustavnite-izmeni-zavrshija-kako-rebus-vo-izjavata-na-borrel-i-varheji-po-izborite-vo-s-makedonija/> (last visit: 3 July 2024)

Assessment of Election Results by Political Parties

Participants in the presidential elections generally shared similar impressions regarding the conduct of the first round of voting. Political parties from the government and the opposition, as well as presidential candidates, assessed the Election Day as peaceful, fair and democratic, noting only minor electoral irregularities.

The ruling SDSM party assessed that the first round of voting occurred in a fair and democratic atmosphere. The party emphasized that citizens expressed their will freely and with dignity, in line with the standards expected of a democratic NATO member state currently engaged in European Union membership negotiations. The SDSM election headquarters noted only a few minor election irregularities, which they considered to be isolated exceptions.¹³⁰ Following the announcement of the initial results, which showed that Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, the candidate supported by VMRO-DPMNE, received nearly twice as many votes as the SDSM-supported candidate, Stevo Pendarovski, SDSM President Dimitar Kovacevski expressed surprise and described the outcome as a form of punishment from the citizens. Kovacevski also noted that the result constituted a significant setback for the country's European prospects but affirmed that the party would persist and anticipated improved results in the second round.¹³¹ Pendarovski remarked that even before the commencement of the elections, the political condition of the pre-election coalition was less than ideal. He noted that the large number of candidates in these elections contributed to a further fragmentation of the votes. Pendarovski encouraged citizens to participate in the second round of voting.¹³²

VMRO-DPMNE Vice President Timco Mucunski stated that the election process was conducted in a fair and democratic atmosphere. However, he identified a series of minor violations, which he attributed to the actions of the ruling parties. Among the violations, Mucunski highlighted issues such as the establishment of improvised headquarters, family voting, and the exertion of pressure on voters. He also noted problems with the technical equipment.¹³³ Mucunski also observed that the high

130 "Democratic Election Day in a Fair and Democratic Atmosphere". SDSM, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://sdsd.org.mk/soopstenija/83192> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

131 "Kovacevski: It is clear that people punished us, we accept that, we expect better results in the second round." Radio Free Europe, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32919404.html> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

132 "Pendarovski: The results are not what we anticipated; we expected a smaller margin. Tomorrow, we start from scratch" 360 Stepeni, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/pendarovski-rezultatite-ne-se-takvi-kakvi-shto-ochekuvavme-smetavme-na-pomala-razlika-od-utre-pochnuvame-od-nula/> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

133 "Post-Election Statements: For Mucunski, the vote was fair and democratic, for Taravari an 'earthquake'". Nezavisen, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://nezavisen.mk/mucunski-izborite-bea-fer-i-vo-demokratska-atmosfera/> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

turnout in the first round of the presidential elections indicated a strong democratic awareness among citizens, demonstrating their understanding of the significance of elections.¹³⁴ Following the announcement of the initial election results, VMRO-DPMNE President Hristijan Mickoski declared them a significant victory for the Macedonian people. Mickoski expressed gratitude to the voters and called for complete national and state unification in the second round of the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 8 May. He also congratulated the opposition within the Albanian political bloc and stressed the importance of a unified effort to ensure that DUI does not secure favorable results in the second round.¹³⁵ VMRO-DPMNE-supported candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova expressed gratitude to the voters and conveyed her pride in the citizens, particularly the women. She anticipated support from all sectors, including the opposition, in the second round of voting.¹³⁶

The *Left* election headquarters assessed that Election Day was generally conducted in a fair and democratic atmosphere, with minor issues at some polling stations. Among these issues, the party identified irregularities in the voter list and problems with technical equipment, which led to overcrowding at the polling stations.¹³⁷ Party leader Dimitar Apasiev emphasized his satisfaction with the Left's preparation for the elections, viewing the results as evidence that *the Left* was the only party experiencing an upward trend in citizen support.¹³⁸ Biljana Vankovska Cvetkovska, the presidential candidate supported by the Left, congratulated the winners of the second round and clarified that her aim was not to win the elections but to challenge the stagnant elite.¹³⁹

Representatives of the movement “Znam – For Our Macedonia” commended the peaceful nature of Election Day, characterizing it as partially fair and democratic, with no serious violations.¹⁴⁰ The president of the movement and presidential candidate,

134 “Siljanovska-Davkova leads the election race, Pendarovski is second.” Radio Free Europe, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/siljanovska-davkova-vodi-pendarovski-vtor/32919344.html> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

135 “Mickoski: This is a victory for the people; the tsunami has risen and looms over their heads. On 8 May, it will completely overwhelm them.” VMRO-DPMNE, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/прес-конференции> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

136 “Siljanovska-Davkova: In the second round, I expect support from everyone, especially from the opposition.” Radio Free Europe, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32919394.html> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

137 “Levica: A peaceful Election Day in a fair and democratic atmosphere”. Radio Free Europe, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32919358.html> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

138 “Vankovska: The avant-garde voted for us, I seem to have offered the people a vision behind two hills.” Libertas, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://libertas.mk/vankovska> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

139 “Vankovska: My goal was not to win, but to upset the stagnant elite.” Netpress, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://netpress.com.mk/vankovska> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

140 “General assessment by the ZNAM Movement “for our Macedonia” of the election process in the first round of the 2024 Presidential Elections.” ZNAM Movement for our Macedonia, 24 April 2024. Accessed at: <https://dvizenjeznam.org.mk/2024/04/24/> (last visit 27.05.2024).

Maksim Dimitrievski, stated that ZNAM is redefining the political landscape of Macedonia. He regarded the elections as a significant success for ZNAM despite their elimination from the next round. Dimitrievski congratulated his opponents and emphasized that the campaign was uneven due to the unequal opportunities imposed by the legislation.¹⁴¹

The head of the DUI election headquarters, Arber Ademi, assessed that the elections were conducted in a democratic spirit and competitive atmosphere. Ademi noted that the citizens exhibited a level of democratic maturity befitting a NATO member state and a candidate for European Union membership.¹⁴² DUI expressed gratitude to the voters, assuring that their will would be respected in future policies. DUI presidential candidate Bujar Osmani declared a notable victory for the European Front coalition over the opposition within the Albanian political bloc. He also highlighted that the citizens have not yet fully transcended the ethnic barriers between the Macedonian and other communities.¹⁴³

The opposition coalition "VLEN/VREDI" also declared victory in the Albanian bloc in these elections, reporting a lead in a significant number of municipalities with a majority Albanian electorate. The coalition accused the political party DUI of involvement in crime, violence, and voter bribery, claiming that DUI had lost its legitimacy to represent ethnic Albanians. Furthermore, VLEN/VREDI members interpreted the higher turnout in these elections as a sign of forthcoming changes and anticipated that this momentum will be mirrored in the parliamentary elections scheduled for 8 May.¹⁴⁴

GROM presidential candidate and incumbent mayor of the municipality of Karpos, Stevcho Jakimovski, congratulated the citizens on conducting dignified elections. He stated that the election campaign was unappealing to voters due to the absence of debates between presidential candidates. Jakimovski also expressed dissatisfaction with the organization of the diaspora vote, noting that it was made more difficult by being scheduled on a working day.¹⁴⁵

141 "Dimitrievski: A new political force has been born in Macedonia which is ready to be a factor of stability in the country." ZNAM Movement for our Macedonia, 25.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://dvizenjeznam.org.mk/2024/04/25/> (last visit: 27.05.2024).

142 "Ademi: Congratulations for the democratic maturity, we expect Osmani's victory". Radio Free Europe, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32919334.html> (last visit: 27 May 2024)

143 "VIDEO: Osmani declares decisive victory of the "European Front" over "VLEN/VREDI": The will of the people is clear and should be respected". 360 Stepeni, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://360stepeni.mk/video-osmani-proglasi-ubedлива-pobeda> (last visit: 27.05.2024).

144 "VLEN/VREDI Coalition admitted defeat, but accused DUI of violent vote-gathering tactics ." Voice of America, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://mk.voanews.com/a/7583846.html> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

145 "Post-Election Statements: For Mucunski, the vote was fair and democratic, for Tarawari an 'earthquake' Nezavisen, 24.04.2024. Accessed at: <https://nezavisen.mk/mucunski-izborite-bea-fer-i-vo-demokratska-atmosfera/> (last visit: 27 May 2024).

The second round of the presidential elections, held on 8 May alongside the parliamentary elections, resulted in the reactions of the participants largely overlapping with their assessments of both the outcome and the conduct of the parliamentary elections.

SDSM President Dimitar Kovacevski assessed the elections as successful, fair, and free, attributing this to the peace and stability established by SDSM as the ruling party in recent years. He congratulated Gordana Siljanovska Davkova on her victory and expressed hope that she would execute her duties in accordance with the constitutional powers, Euro-Atlantic commitments, and state obligations. Kovacevski acknowledged the election result as a significant setback for SDSM and emphasized the importance of focusing on regaining the lost trust of the citizens in the upcoming period. He announced plans for substantial personnel changes within the party and the election of a new president. Kovacevski also called for internal party elections across all party bodies at both central and local levels.¹⁴⁶ Stevo Pendarovski expressed gratitude to the institutions that ensured Election Day was conducted in a fair and democratic manner. He congratulated the winners and conveyed his regret that his vision of a multiethnic Macedonia, fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures, did not receive majority support.¹⁴⁷

Following the announcement of the final results, VMRO-DPMNE and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova declared a dual victory in the elections at a press conference. Party leader Hristijan Mickoski stated that President Siljanovska Davkova's objective would be to restore dignity to the country, expressing confidence in her capabilities. Mickoski also asserted that crime, corruption, and incompetence—factors that had caused the country to suffer—had been overcome and emphasized the need for accountability.¹⁴⁸ Davkova expressed her pleasure at becoming the country's first female president and vowed to defend national interests to the best of her ability. She promised to be a president for all citizens and commended the electorate for demonstrating civic resilience and resistance to calls for a boycott.¹⁴⁹

146 "Kovacevski: SDSM and the Coalition will be responsible, strong, principled and state opposition, the process of internal renewal must be at all levels." SDSM, 08.05.2024. Accessed at: <https://sdsd.org.mk/pres-konferencii/84398> (last visit: 30 May 2024)

147 "Pendarovski congratulates the election winners". Radio Free Europe, 08.05.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32938654.html> (last visit: 30 May 2024).

148 "Mickoski: The people gave the most important lesson to the government and saved their country." VMRO-DPMNE, 08.05.2024. Accessed at: <https://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/прес-конференции/мицкоски> (last visit: 30 May 2024).

149 "I will do my best to defend the national interests," said the new President Siljanovska-Davkova. Sakam da kazam, 08.05.2024. Accessed at: <https://sdk.mk/index.php/izbori-2024/> (last visit: 30 May 2024)

Conclusions

The seventh presidential elections since the independence of the Republic of North Macedonia, held on 24 April (first round) and 8 May (second round), were conducted in a fair and democratic atmosphere, without incidents and major irregularities. The elections resulted in a convincing victory for the candidate supported by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition “Your Macedonia”, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, making her the first female president since the country's independence. According to the final results announced by the State Election Commission (SEC) on 11 May, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova received 561,000 votes, or 65.14 per cent of the total vote, while Stevo Pendarovski received 251,899 votes, or 29.25 per cent of the total vote. Voter turnout in the second round of presidential elections stood at 47.47 per cent, successfully meeting the quorum required for the election of the president.¹⁵⁰ No complaints were submitted to the SEC with respect to the results of the presidential elections.

Seven candidates contested the presidential elections. Based on the results of the first election round, the second round was contested by Gordana Siljanovska Davkova and Stevo Pendarovski.

On 2 May, the SEC released the final results of the first round of presidential elections.¹⁵¹ The conclusion noted a total of 1,814,317 voters registered in the voter register for the elections held on 24 April, with a turnout of 905,622 voters. With a turnout of 49.93 percent in the first round, the ballot count included 908,720 unused ballots, 881,040 valid ballots, and 24,560 invalid ballots.

According to the official results of the first election round, the competing presidential candidates secured the following score: Stevo Pendarovski 180,499 votes, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova 363,085 votes, Stevcho Jakimovski 8,121 votes, Bujar Osmani 120,811 votes, Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska 41,331 votes, Arben Taravari 83,337 votes, and Maksim Dimitrievski 83,855 votes.

According to the submitted financial reports, the candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova incurred the highest expenses in her election campaign, totaling to MKD 164,839,182 (EUR 2,680,311) by the end of the campaign. The candidate Stevo Pendarovski ran a campaign with a total expenditure of MKD 162,774,917 (EUR

¹⁵⁰ The State Election Commission issued the president-elect certificate to Gordana Siljanovska Davkova <https://www.sec.mk/drzhavnata-izborna-komisija-i-go-predade-uverenieto-za-izbor-na-pretsedatel-na-drzhavata-na-gordana-siljanovska-davkova/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

¹⁵¹ Conclusion on the Final Results of the Voting for the President of the Republic of North Macedonia held on 24.04.2024 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19p92UR04jpFuXlr7cQYGlxTRjwZaNHNY/view?pli=1> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

2,646,747). Other presidential candidates who did not advance to the second round included Bujar Osmani with a total campaign expenditure of MKD 54,373,771 (EUR 884,126), Arben Taravari with MKD 48,668,681 (EUR 791,361), Stevčo Jakimovski with MKD 9,974,688 (EUR 162,190), Maksim Dimitrievski with MKD 9,897,805 (EUR 160,940), and Biljana Vankovska-Cvetkovska with MKD 9,894,076 (EUR 160,879).

These results provided Gordana Siljanovska Davkova with a substantial lead over Stevo Pendarovski, giving her a strong head start in the second round. Siljanovska Davkova expressed her gratitude for the support and emphasized that this marked the beginning of a new era that required dignified conduct and a rejection of Balkan stereotypes. She pledged to cooperate with VMRO-DPMNE, the government, the opposition, and the non-governmental sector.¹⁵²

Pendarovski acknowledged that the first-round results fell short of expectations but affirmed his resolve to continue, emphasizing that the second round would be a fresh start. He stressed that he would not seek any agreements with the other candidates for mechanical transfer of votes in the second round. Instead, he urged his supporters to turn out in higher numbers.¹⁵³

In response to public allegations of a potential organized boycott of the second round, Pendarovski consistently dismissed these claims between the two electoral rounds. On Election Day, he condemned attempts to boycott, arguing that this restricted the democratic right of choice for those who came out to vote.¹⁵⁴

Siljanovska Davkova's decisive first-round victory had a significant impact on the outcome of both, the parliamentary and presidential elections on 8 May. The final results of the second round indicated that Pendarovski did not receive support from the "European Front" led by DUI, which contributed to a wider margin for Siljanovska Davkova compared to the first round. Notably, DUI attempted a "silent" boycott on Election Day aiming to prevent the quorum needed for the presidential election. Although DUI did not publicly call for a boycott, some party leaders voted only in the parliamentary elections, as reflected in the higher turnout for the parliamentary vote compared to the second presidential round. Meanwhile, the VLEN/VREDI movement called for a high turnout in the second round without endorsing any

152 Siljanovska Davkova leads Pendarovski by double digits <https://prizma.mk/silanovska-davkova-so-dvojna-prednost-pred-pendarovski/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

153 Pendarovski: The results are not what we expected, no surrender <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32919395.html> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

154 Pendarovski: I was always an optimist, even after the results of the first round <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/politika/pendarovski-sekogash-bev-optimist-i-po-rezultatite-od-prvot-krug/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

candidate. Other presidential candidates also refrained from endorsing either of the candidates in the second round, urging voters to vote according to their own convictions.

During the pre-election period, candidates were able to freely present their political platforms and engage with voters. The official campaign for the first round of presidential elections was conducted in the period between 4 April and 22 April. The campaign for the second presidential round started on 24 April and overlapped with the campaign for the parliamentary elections, concluding on 6 May. Throughout the pre-election period, the presidential candidates and their respective political parties and coalitions organized extensive rallies and public meetings. Major campaign issues included European integration, constitutional amendments, anti-corruption efforts, and the rule of law, foreign policy, diplomacy, defense, and the economy. While the campaign primarily focused on the positive promotion of candidates, some negative rhetoric and political polarization emerged, particularly after the first round. This polarization, mirroring voter sentiment, had a notable impact on the final election results. The campaign in the first election round included a televised debate featuring all seven presidential candidates. In the second round, three televised debates were held between Stevo Pendarovski and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova.

On 12 May, 2024, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova was inaugurated as President of the Republic of North Macedonia, following her oath of office before the Assembly. She succeeded the seventh presidential election and became the sixth President of the country. In her address to the tenth composition of the Assembly, Siljanovska Davkova committed to fulfilling the trust placed in her and vowed to serve all citizens impartially.¹⁵⁵

The inauguration ceremony at the Assembly was attended by members of the new parliament, government officials, representatives from state institutions and religious communities, as well as members of the diplomatic corp.

Subsequent to the Assembly ceremony, an official handover was held at the President's Office, where President Gordana Siljanovska Davkova formally assumed her presidential duties with the highest state and military honors.

Following the handover of the presidential duties, President Siljanovska Davkova

¹⁵⁵ Inauguration of the president-elect Gordana Siljanovska Davkova https://pretsedatel.mk/inauguracija_12052024/ (last visit: 22 June 2024)

met privately with the former President Stevo Pendarovski. During this meeting, Pendarovski congratulated her on the victory and extended his best wishes for her tenure.

Both Siljanovska Davkova and Pendarovski commended the electoral process, affirming that the elections mirrored the will of the Macedonian electorate and underscored the democratic maturity of the country.¹⁵⁶

The OSCE/ODIHR International Observation Mission assessed the electoral process as competitive in both, the parliamentary and presidential elections, with fundamental freedoms respected and citizens able to make informed choices. The main remarks concerned the legal framework, particularly the Electoral Code. Overall, OSCE/ODIHR concluded that the elections were administered effectively, given the complexities of conducting two distinct elections concurrently.¹⁵⁷

In the days following the election, Siljanovska Davkova received numerous congratulations from regional and European leaders.¹⁵⁸ U.S. Ambassador Angela Ageler characterized the election of North Macedonia's first female president as historic and reiterated continued U.S. support for the country's full integration into Europe. EU Ambassador David Geer expressed anticipation for close cooperation with the new president to advance North Macedonia's European future.

¹⁵⁶ Official handover ceremony for the Office of the President https://pretsedatel.mk/primopredavanje_12052024/ (last visit: 22 June 2024)

¹⁵⁷ Positive preliminary assessment from OSCE/ODIHR of Election Day, with concerns over swift amendments to the Electoral Code <https://360stepeni.mk/preliminarna-pozitivna-otsenka-od-obse-odih-r-za-vcherashniot-izboren-den-zabeleshka-za-brzite-izmeni-na-izborniot-zakonik/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)

¹⁵⁸ Regional and European congratulations for Siljanovska-Davkova's victory <https://makfax.com.mk/makedonija/%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%98%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B4/> (last visit: 22 June 2024)



5

**Election Archive of the Republic
of North Macedonia,
Comprehensive Database
from 1990 Onwards**

5. Election Archive of the Republic of North Macedonia, Comprehensive Database from 1990 Onwards

Since March 2016, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's office in North Macedonia and the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje (IDSCS) have been implementing the joint project "Electoral Archive of the Republic of North Macedonia since 1990 to date". The aim of the project is to enable comprehensive monitoring of the electoral processes in the Republic of North Macedonia. The project encompasses all previously held presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, consolidating all available documents related to these electoral processes into a single repository.

The need to implement such a project arises from the lack of an official state archive containing all documents and data on election cycles since the declaration of independence of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Election Archive groups the documents into seven sections:

1. Election Announcement Document
2. Voter List
3. Candidate Lists
4. Election Results
5. Election Report
6. Observation reports from international and domestic organizations
7. Electoral Code

In parallel with the organization of the elections, the Election Archive is updated and all relevant documents are uploaded in the above sections. A key feature of the Election Archive is its collection of election handbooks. These handbooks, which cover presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, are created in real time alongside the electoral events in a collaborative effort of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje.

The Election Archive has released a series of eight in-depth handbooks covering various elections. These include detailed information on the 2013, 2017, and 2021 local elections, the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, as well as the 2014, 2016, and 2020 parliamentary elections. The handbooks are available on the Election Archive website (izbornaarhiva.mk) in Macedonian, Albanian, and English.

