

## **REFERENDUM 2018**

**21.09.2018, Skopje**

### **INTERIM REFERENDUM MONITORING REPORT (3–16 September 2018)**

The Citizens Association MOST began the monitoring of the referendum on 3 September, by deploying 80 long-term observers who cover all the municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia. MOST monitors the work of the State Election Commission (SEC), the municipal election commissions (MECs), as well as the activities of all subjects related to the upcoming referendum.

According to the law on referendum the campaign began with its announcement (30 July). However, the activities of the subjects were intensified as of 31 August.

Within the monitoring period MOST received 311 election campaign reports and 978 daily reports on events in the municipalities. From the reports it can be concluded that the only subject that conducts intensive field activities is the coalition "Together for European Macedonia". The campaign is mainly conducted through direct meetings with citizens, while a higher intensity of door-to-door campaign has been noticed as well. There are also a significantly lower percentage of noted activities by subjects that propagate for the citizens not to vote on the referendum. At the same time, international and domestic organizations, as well as other subjects, organize informative debates and forums. MOST believes that these informative activities contribute towards increasing the level of knowledge and awareness of the citizens.

The call of the Prime Minister, urging the businessmen to financially motivate the employees in their companies to vote is an unethical move that should not be part of such an important process as this. Such behavior sets a precedent that it could become part of the campaign and the behavior of the politicians in the future.

MOST welcomes the introduction of the web-tool by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration that enables reporting pressures in the administration. Especially positive is the fact that the tool provides for anonymous reporting, which should encourage more the public employees to report potential pressures. Not a single pressure has been reported through this tool within the monitoring period.

The new members of the SEC were appointed immediately before the announcement of the referendum, on a 6-month term. The President and two members were proposed by the opposition, while the Vice-President and three members were proposed by the ruling majority. Within the monitoring period the SEC worked in a collegial manner and all the decisions have been adopted unanimously, which is to be welcomed. The transparency of the SEC work is positively assessed as well, since for the first time all SEC sessions are public, and also for the first time the obligation from the Election Code for regular publishing of the minutes from the sessions on the Internet is observed. Additionally, the SEC holds the sessions in the time interval prescribed in its Rules of Procedure.

On the other hand, while adjudicating upon the requests for relieving of duty by the members of the municipal election commissions (MECs), the SEC accepted one request due to professional duties, although this ground for relieving of duty has not been prescribed with the Election Code. Therefore, maybe it is necessary to explore the possibility for increasing the number of grounds for relieving of duty of the members of the election bodies. Certain mistakes have been noticed in the manual for training of the election administration, as well as inconsistencies of some of its parts with the video-manual that was prepared by the SEC and that is used in the training of the election administration.

MOST also monitored the procedure for supplementing the composition of the election boards by 73 MECs. It has to be noted that the process was completed several days after the legal deadline. For the first time the appointment was not conducted concurrently for several MECs at once, but individually, which contributed towards increasing the transparency and the opportunity for monitoring and control of the process. The general conclusion from the monitoring is that the database of the public employees contains inaccurate data that makes the random selection of the election boards members more difficult. Additionally, there is the dilemma whether certain professions, such as doctors and other health workers who are not part of the administration defined in a more narrow way, should be part of the employees who are appointed as members of the election bodies. There is a need to improve the software and the database for appointment of the members of the elections bodies, as well as to review the manner of selection and the composition of the election bodies.

MOST encourages the citizens to inform themselves about all aspects regarding the referendum, to actively participate in the decision-making process and to vote according to their personal belief and will. Any pressure, extortion or intimidation of the citizens is contrary to the democratic values and principles.

MOST encourages the citizens to report any pressures or irregularities on the free-of-charge telephone line 080-080-080

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The opinions expressed within this press release are those of MOST, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the endorsers of the project.

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