

## ***PATHWAY TO FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS***

### **PRESS RELEASE** **17.02.2016, Skopje**

The Citizens Association "MOST", the Association for Democratic Initiatives - Gostivar, the Center for Economic Analyses, the First Children's Embassy in the World "Megjashi" and the Youth Cultural Center – Bitola have been comprehensively monitoring the period before the announcement of the elections since December 2015. The implementation of the project has been announced on a press-conference, held on 11 December 2015.

The monitoring covers several segments such as the political context, including the payment of subsidies, the inter-ethnic relations, the activities of the political parties, the central and the local government and the misuse of state resources and administration, as well as the pressures on employees in the administration, citizens, youth and abuse of children for political purposes. MOST's observers are already deployed in all 80 municipalities throughout the country and observe the public events organized by the political parties and the promotional activities of the public institutions.

From the 1.0141 received reports, MOST concludes the following:

We salute the instruction given by the Prime Minister for conducting the elections to the functionaries by which he urges them not to allow their activities to be understood as potential pressure or intimidation of the voters. However, according to our information, the employees in the administration in at least 4 municipalities were instructed to prepare lists of potential voters of VMRO-DPMNE. We underline that this practice contravenes Article 160 of the Criminal Code, violation of the voter's freedom of choice. Additionally, a pressure upon the employees in the administration to attend party rallies was noticed in 3 municipalities. There have been also 3 cases of surveying the pensioners by VMRO-DPMNE and in one case there has been a list of pensioners with the logo of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

We encourage the citizens to report any kind of pressure, intimidation or threats on the MOST's free-of-charge telephone line, 080 080 080, as well as the free-of-charge telephone line of the Ombudsman, 0800 54321, which has been activated as a part of the cooperation within this project.

Use of official vehicles for party purposes has been noticed. This practice contravenes Article 356 of the Criminal Code, Article 25 from the Law on Prevention of Corruption, as well as Article 28 of the Decree for the Conditions and the Manner of Usage of the Services provided by the Office for General and Common Affairs within the Government of the RM. Some of the political parties use the halls of the cultural centers and other public institutions for conducting their activities. We underline that if an invoice for this service is not sent, this represents a violation of Article 20 of the Law on Financing of Political Parties where it is explicitly stated that public institutions cannot donate to political parties, with the free provision of services also being considered as a donation according to the Law.

MOST has been also monitoring the promotional events organized by state and public institutions and it has been noticed that representatives of all parties within the Government for conducting the elections do not observe the principle of separation of state and party, i.e. they promote their party programs.

As for the appearances of the functionaries on party events, although the greater part of the party activities are conducted after working hours, there are some cases when the functionaries attended these events during working hours.

Considering the fact that the State Election Commission has been tasked with the cleaning of the Voters List, its work is very important and the conducting of the elections on 24 April partially depends on it. However, although the Election Code explicitly states that the SEC's sessions are public, the SEC continues its practice to conduct some of its sessions without the presence of the media and the public. We underline that all the processes related to the implementation of the so-called Przino Agreement have to have the highest level of transparency. It is unacceptable for the SEC's work to be conducted hidden from the public eye, at so-called working meetings, while the institute official session to be a charade for the public on which the SEC's members only confirm the already adopted decisions.

As for the payment of subsidies, according to the report by the Center for Economic Analyses, payments from the program for 2014 have been conducted after the legal deadline of 30.06.2015. In the period July-November 2015 a total of 737,21 million denars, or almost 12 million euro have been transferred after the deadline.

MKC-Bitola has been monitoring the implementation of the Law on Transformation of Temporary Positions into Permanent Contracts has been also monitored, and as of 30.11.2015 5.141 persons had had their temporary employment transferred to a permanent one. Although they also requested classification of these employments by institutions and municipalities, the Ministry of Finance responded that according to the Law there is no obligation for maintaining this kind of data/registry.

As for the monitoring of the abuse of children for political purposes, from the analysis by Megjashi it can be concluded that there is no reasonable doubt in the registered cases until now which can be supported by evidence of abuse of children for political purposes. Megjashi appeals to the political parties, their members, the institutions and the parents to abstain from any involvement of children in activities related to the political parties.

There were no inter-ethnic incidents in the monitored period, however, in the printed and electronic media there were several cases of hate speech, use of discriminatory and stereotyping speech on ethnic ground, negative speech directed towards individuals/groups which does not encourage the spirit of tolerance, the mutual respect and understanding between individuals from different ethnic and cultural background, as well as demonization of some figures on the political scene.

This project Pathway to Free and Fair Elections is supported by the Embassy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the National Democratic Institute and the National Endowment for Democracy.

**Free-of-charge telephone lines**

Citizens Association MOST – 080 080 080

First Children's Embassy in the World "Megjashi" – 0800 1 2222

Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia – 0800 5 4321

# # # # #

For additional information: Citizens Association MOST, phone 02/30 99 384