



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Republic of Bulgaria – Early Parliamentary Elections, 19 April 2026

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The 19 April early parliamentary elections, marked by an increased participation, were administered transparently and efficiently, despite gaps in the legislative framework and a last-minute amendment that undermined the stability of the electoral law. Held against a backdrop of repeated elections and prolonged political instability, the authorities undertook measures to safeguard electoral integrity, including efforts to address persistent allegations of vote buying and intimidation. Fundamental freedoms were generally respected, but the campaign was highly polarized and marked by negative rhetoric. Online campaigning, which is largely unregulated, played a prominent role in voter engagement while also facilitating circulation of disinformation narratives, including about government activities. The existing campaign finance framework provided limited transparency and oversight. Institutional efforts to counter the risk of cyber threats and potential foreign interference were negatively affected by gaps in the implementation and co-ordination between oversight bodies. The media environment is diverse and pluralistic but was constrained by political and economic influence, self-censorship, and the prevalence of paid and pre-arranged coverage. Women remained significantly underrepresented both as candidates and in elected office. Election day was generally calm and orderly, but some procedural shortcomings were noted.

The legal framework for parliamentary elections provides a generally adequate basis for democratic elections. However, gaps remain in the regulation of campaigning, online activities, third-party engagement, and the use of administrative resources, as well as contradictions in some procedural provisions. Frequent last-minute amendments adopted without broad consensus, including a recent change limiting the number of polling stations in non-European Union (EU) countries, adopted after the elections had already been called, undermined both the stability of the electoral law and the inclusiveness of the process. While some prior ODIHR and Venice Commission of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission) recommendations have been addressed, a number of key recommendations remain outstanding, including those on candidate residency requirements, campaign finance oversight, effective legal redress, and the participation of women and minority groups.

The election administration operated within legal deadlines and efficiently managed preparations across all levels. Led by the Central Election Commission (CEC), the administration enjoyed general trust and ensured overall transparency, including through public sessions, live streams, and the timely publication of decisions. However, challenges persisted, including late resignations by Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members and gaps in training due to the absence of a dedicated CEC training unit and methodology. In addition, legal ambiguities in PEC appointments occasionally affected the full representation of all parliamentary parties. While voter awareness campaigns and accessibility measures for persons with hearing impairments were implemented, adaptations for voters with visual or cognitive impairments remained limited.

Elections relied on a combination of paper and electronic voting. In addition to paper voting, electronic voting machines (EVMs) were also used in polling stations with 300 or more registered voters. The certification of EVMs, including verification of conformity and trusted software build, was conducted transparently. Installation of EVMs and associated devices was completed in a timely manner. Concerns remained regarding the CEC's limited institutional control of EVMs due to the failure to establish a legally required dedicated unit. The law does not provide for independent certification of the result management system, contrary to international good practice and a previous ODIHR recommendation.

All citizens aged 18 and over are eligible to vote, except those deprived of legal capacity by a final court decision and those serving a prison sentence, regardless of the severity of the crime. These blanket restrictions are at odds with principles of universal and equal suffrage under OSCE commitments, the Council of Europe, and other international standards. Voter lists are compiled automatically and include all eligible voters with a permanent address. While the lists were generally accurate and open to public scrutiny, concerns remained regarding high registration rates among voters living abroad, which were perceived to potentially lead to misinterpretation of turnout figures, among other issues. The October 2024 amendments enabled approximately 27,060 eligible voters to be included in provisional voter lists; however, this measure was not complemented by proactive public information campaigns to maximize participation. The final voter lists included approximately 6.5 million citizens.

Citizens aged 21 and over by election day were eligible to stand for election, with those holding dual citizenship able to contest following constitutional amendments, in line with prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations. However, an 18-month residency requirement was imposed on prospective candidates, contrary to international standards. Candidates could be nominated by registered political parties or coalitions, or run independently in a single constituency. In total, 14 political parties, 10 coalitions, and 1 independent candidate were registered through an inclusive and transparent process, representing 4,786 candidates, of whom 30 per cent were women. Registration was denied to one party and one coalition due to deficiencies in supporting signatures, in line with legal requirements.

Fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression were generally respected, and contestants were able to campaign freely through rallies, voter meetings, and media engagement, including social media. The campaign environment was highly polarized, characterized by personal attacks and negative narratives targeting political opponents. Traditional campaign activities remained visible, with key policy issues such as energy, foreign policy, corruption, rising living costs, the rule of law, and infrastructure dominating campaign messaging. The legal framework includes some safeguards against misuse of administrative resources, but gaps remain. In some instances, campaigning by public officials during working hours blurred the line between state and party, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice. Allegations of vote buying, alongside intensified investigations and arrests related to such irregularities, were prominent in the campaign environment.

The government launched initiatives to prevent, detect, and protect the election infrastructure and the campaign from foreign interference, disinformation, and cyberattacks, through intergovernmental structures. While no threats or interference were reported, voter awareness of methodology and procedures for tackling such threats was lacking in the lead-up to the elections. The ODIHR EOM observed that social media played a prominent role in campaign strategies. Overall, one political party recorded the highest levels of engagement and visibility across platforms, with several others recording comparable levels of engagement and viewership. The ODIHR EOM also observed disinformation used to discredit opponents or reinforce narratives, and noted reports of co-ordinated behaviour and the use of opponents' hashtags. Although government authorities established mechanisms to address disinformation, cyber threats, and foreign interference, gaps in the implementation of the EU Digital Services Act and delays in co-ordination between oversight bodies limited their effectiveness.

Women remain underrepresented in public and political life, holding less than one-third of parliamentary seats and a limited share of government positions, with few parties promoting women candidates or addressing women's political participation in their campaigns. The ODIHR EOM was made aware of several instances of gender-based attacks and smear campaigns, including the use of AI-generated content to defame a woman journalist. Positively, women featured as prominent speakers in more than half of the campaign events observed. Campaign messaging targeting youth emphasized social benefits, dissatisfaction with the political system, and the promotion of young candidates. The Constitution restricts parties based on ethnicity, race, or religion, and legislation requires that election

campaigns be conducted only in Bulgarian language, contrary to prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations and international standards. Party platforms largely overlooked minority issues.

The legal framework governing party and campaign finance remains unchanged, leaving prior ODIHR recommendations unaddressed, including those on the lack of pre-election reporting and limited oversight by the National Audit Office (NAO). The legislation does not regulate third-party campaigning, and online political advertising is not subject to comprehensive disclosure, creating potential loopholes for unregulated spending, further reducing transparency. Overall, the campaign finance framework provides limited transparency and oversight, including due to delays in reporting and the concentration of donations just below disclosure thresholds.

The media landscape is diverse, yet ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns about declining independence, political and economic influence over outlets, and widespread self-censorship, limiting voters' access to impartial and comprehensive information. While legal guarantees for freedom of expression and access to information exist, criminal defamation and unimplemented safeguards under the European Media Freedom Act remain concerns for editorial independence. Election coverage was largely shaped by pre-arranged agreements and paid content, which diminished media scrutiny of candidates and their programmes. Debates organized by several media outlets did not feature party leaders, as they declined to participate. The Public broadcasters generally abided by their legal obligations to provide equal coverage to all contestants. However, the ODIHR EOM media monitoring indicated that, despite formal compliance with airtime rules, limited analytical reporting, coupled with a reduced scope for editorial and critical news coverage, weakened voters' ability to make informed choices.

Election dispute resolution is provided for through both election commissions and administrative courts, with expedited procedures for filing complaints. However, gaps in the legal framework, including restrictive standing, the inability to challenge election results protocols directly, and lengthy sanctioning and enforcement processes, limited access to effective legal remedies and undermined due process. The ODIHR EOM observed a high number of pre-electoral complaints, many of which were not examined on the merits due to procedural constraints, while law enforcement efforts addressed vote buying and intimidation but were subject to long deadlines and concerns regarding prosecutorial independence.

The Electoral Code provides for citizen and international observation, including by authorized representatives of contestants. The CEC registered 26 civil society organizations with 2,760 observers. While no nationwide citizen election observation occurred, select organizations focused on high-risk polling stations. International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) was able to observe all key stages of electoral preparations.

Overall, election day was conducted in a calm and orderly manner across all stages of the electoral process, with no significant disruptions reported. The IEOM observers assessed opening, voting, counting, and tabulation predominantly positively, reflecting a broadly consistent administration of the process. While the vast majority of polling stations operated smoothly, some procedural shortcomings were noted, including isolated cases in ballot handling, occasional compromises to the secrecy of the vote, and limited failures to apply prescribed voter verification procedures. Technical issues with EVMs affected a small number of polling stations, with some devices requiring repairs or a switch to paper ballots; however, these issues did not materially affect the overall conduct of the elections. Live-streaming of the count contributed to public confidence in the process. Tabulation was generally well organized, and the publication of preliminary results contributed to transparency.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background and Political Context

On 11 December 2025, following large-scale protests triggered by a draft budget proposing increases in social-security taxes and state administration salaries, and set against longstanding concerns related to governance, clientelism, and corruption, the government resigned.¹ On 23 January, Vice-President Iliana Iotova assumed the role of acting president after Rumen Radev stepped down to participate in the elections. After constitutionally required consultations, on 12 February, the acting president appointed Andrey Gyurov, Deputy Governor of the Bulgarian National Bank and former member of the parliament from the We Continue the Change (PP) party, to form a caretaker government. These elections were the eighth parliamentary elections since 2021.

The election environment was shaped by continued institutional instability and limited trust among political actors, which contributed to concerns regarding electoral integrity. With a view to consolidating administrative control, the caretaker government replaced all 28 regional governors, as well as most directors of provincial directorates of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and police chiefs. In an attempt to restore public confidence in the electoral process, the caretaker government established a Co-ordination Council for Preparation of the Elections, appointed an adviser on elections, and introduced a temporary co-ordination mechanism to counter disinformation and hybrid threats. It also provided regular briefings on measures aimed at preventing electoral violations. On 30 March, the government signed a 10-year defence co-operation agreement with Ukraine, a step which was criticized by a number of contesting parties, as well as the acting president.² A proposal by the Revival to terminate the agreement during an extraordinary parliamentary session failed due to a lack of quorum.

The pre-election public discourse was influenced by disinformation narratives in the broader geopolitical context, which, together with embedded political polarization, may have affected voters' ability to make an informed choice. At the same time, socio-economic issues, notably the rising cost of living and inflation, remained prominent concerns for an electorate showing signs of fatigue from repeated electoral cycles, further shaping public perceptions and engagement in the elections.

Women remain underrepresented in political life, despite the commitments made through the National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men for the period 2021–2030.³ In the outgoing parliament, women make up 28.75 per cent of members, while in the caretaker government, they hold only 6 of 21 positions.⁴ At the same time, a woman currently serves as acting President, and women hold 8 of the 15 seats in the Central Election Commission (CEC) and 6 of the 12 seats in the Constitutional Court.

¹ The October 2024 early parliamentary elections produced a fragmented parliament with initially eight political parties and coalitions: Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) in coalition with the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), We Continue the Change in coalition with Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB), *Vazrazhdane* (Revival), Movement for Rights and Freedoms–New Beginning (DPS-NN), Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)–United Left, Alliance for Rights and Freedoms (APS), There Is Such A People (ITN) and Morality, Unity, Honour (MECh). A minority government was formed, headed by Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov and composed of GERB-SDS, BSP–United Left, and ITN, with the support of APS. Following the Constitutional Court [decision](#) in March 2025, the recount of votes enabled *Velichie* (Greatness) to enter the parliament.

² The president [criticized](#) the caretaker prime minister for disrupting the dialogue between the institutions when signing the agreement. The PB leader [claimed](#) that the agreement increased the risks to national security. Revival leader [stated](#) that “the exploitative agreement with Ukraine must be terminated” and that “the people who signed the agreement with Ukraine must be arrested and brought to trial immediately”.

³ See the [National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men for the period 2021–2030](#). See also the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision MC.DEC/7/09](#).

⁴ Within the last appointed Council of Ministers, only 1 of 21 members (4.8 per cent) was a woman.

Legal Framework and Electoral System

Bulgaria is party to key international and regional instruments that set out obligations pertaining to the conduct of democratic elections.⁵ Parliamentary elections are primarily governed by the 1991 Constitution, the 2014 Election Code, and the 2005 Political Parties Act, and are complemented by decisions of the CEC.⁶ The most notable amendments to the Election Code were adopted in 2022 and 2023. These included the removal of the prohibition on dual citizens standing for parliamentary office; provisions regulating voting and counting methods, and their oversight; the introduction of safeguards aimed at enhancing transparency; and revision to the organization of the election administration and polling station arrangements, partially addressing previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.⁷ Amendments adopted in February 2026, after the elections had been called,⁸ introduced a cap of 20 polling stations in non-European Union (EU) countries, limiting the establishment of polling stations outside diplomatic premises, which may have had a disproportionate impact on voters in countries with large diasporas.⁹

Overall, the election-related legal framework forms a generally adequate basis for the conduct of elections; however, certain gaps and inconsistencies remain. These include a narrow definition of election campaigning; the lack of regulation of online campaigning, including third-party activities; and the limited scope of rules on the use of administrative resources, which do not address the advantages of incumbency (see Campaign Environment). In addition, some provisions in the Election Code may be difficult to reconcile in practice, at times placing the CEC in a position where compliance with one provision may affect compliance with another.¹⁰ Further, frequent revisions of the legal framework, including shortly before the elections and without broad cross-party support, undermined inclusivity and stability of the electoral law, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice.¹¹ The Constitutional Court has also stated that frequent revision of the legislation “does not contribute to building and strengthening trust in the electoral process and its results, guaranteeing the universal, equal and direct right to vote by secret ballot for every citizen”.¹² A number of prior ODIHR and Venice

⁵ The [1950 European Convention on Human Rights](#) and its Protocol No. 1 (Article 3), the [1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), the [1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW), the [1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), the [2003 United Nations Convention against Corruption](#) (UNCAC), the [2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD). Bulgaria is also a member of the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Bulgaria has signed but not ratified the [2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence](#).

⁶ Some notable CEC decisions cover the [registration of parties and coalitions](#), the [determination of the number of mandates](#), [voter lists](#), and [out-of-country voting](#).

⁷ See ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint opinion on amendments to the electoral code of Bulgaria, [CDL-AD\(2017\)016](#). See also ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Opinion on the Amendments to the Electoral Code of Bulgaria, [CDL-AD\(2014\)001](#).

⁸ With particular regard to amendments enacted after elections have been called, the [Venice Commission Revised Interpretative Declaration on the Stability of Electoral Law](#) Section II.B.6.A. states that “once elections have been called, no amendments to electoral law should be made, unless they are strictly necessary to comply with binding decisions by national constitutional courts or supreme courts with equivalent jurisdiction, or by international courts”.

⁹ See the [explanatory note](#) substantiating these amendments. Subsequently, there were 27 polling stations in Türkiye (168 in 2024), 28 in the United Kingdom (112 in 2024), and 24 in the United States (53 in 2024). The authorities informed the ODIHR EOM that they established additional polling stations within diplomatic missions with a view to facilitating voting abroad.

¹⁰ The law limits PECs to seven members but requires all parliamentary parties to be represented. With nine parties in parliament, the CEC allowed up to nine members, ensuring representation but exceeding the legal limit.

¹¹ Paragraph 5.8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that the legislation should be “adopted at the end of a public procedure”. [Venice Commission Revised Interpretative Declaration on the Stability of Electoral Law](#), suggests that amendments within a year to elections are permissible if they are in accordance with international standards and based “on consensus between government and opposition and on broad public consultations.” See also the [2002 Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#), section 2, and the [2025 Venice Commission Updated Rule of Law Checklist](#), II.A.6.

¹² See the Constitutional Court 2025 [decision](#).

Commission recommendations remain unaddressed, including those concerning the residency requirement for candidates, the transparency and oversight of campaign finance, the effective investigation and sanctioning of electoral violations, legal avenues to challenge election results, and measures to enhance the participation of women and minority groups. Since 2024, proposed amendments by political parties, as well as a CEC proposal addressing technical and administrative aspects of the electoral process, have not been considered by the parliament.¹³

The parliament is composed of 240 members elected for a four-year term through an open-list proportional representation system in 31 multi-member constituencies. The constituencies correspond to the country's administrative divisions, with Sofia divided into three constituencies and Plovdiv into two.¹⁴ The number of mandates in each constituency, which cannot be lower than four, is based on the most recent population census.¹⁵ The electoral threshold for political parties and coalitions is four per cent of the valid votes cast nationwide, while independent candidates must meet the constituency quota, calculated on the basis of the Hare-Niemeyer method. Members are elected from open candidate lists with a single preferential vote. If no preference is indicated, the preferential vote is counted for the first candidate on the list. To alter the order of candidates on a list, a candidate must receive preferential votes equal to at least seven per cent of votes cast for that list in the respective constituency.

Election Administration

The elections were administered by a three-tiered election administration structure responsible for electoral preparations, consisting of the CEC, 31 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 11,836 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) nationwide, alongside state ministries, local authorities, and one technical service provider.¹⁶

The election administration enjoyed general trust among different stakeholders and the electorate. The CEC is a permanent body composed of 15 members appointed for a five-year term, with its current composition established in May 2021. Eight of its members are women, including the chairperson and the spokesperson. All 31 DECs, comprising 439 members, were appointed by the 27 February deadline. In 29 DECs where the governor's offices could not reach an agreement, the CEC intervened to appoint members. Subsequently, a total of 12 members were replaced, including 1 DEC secretary, for participating in a political event. There were a total of 262 women members (59.7 per cent) at the DECs, including 17 chairpersons (54.8 per cent).¹⁷

The PECs comprise between five and nine members, depending on the number of registered voters at the respective precinct. However, in some cases, legal provisions requiring both a fixed number of PEC members and representation of all parliamentary parties resulted in the appointment of up to nine members in smaller PECs. Despite the CEC's efforts to streamline PEC appointments through specific decisions, the process was hampered by persistent challenges, including resignations due to nominations

¹³ The amendments, proposed by APS, BSP, ITN, PP-DB and Revival, included changes to voter registration modalities, a full transition to machine-based voting, adjustments to procedures for counting machine votes, and revisions to candidate eligibility criteria. The CEC [proposal](#) addressed technical and administrative aspects, such as, adjusting deadlines for the appointment of polling station commissions, refinements to public procurement procedures to accommodate tight electoral timelines, and simplification of vote counting procedures.

¹⁴ On 27 February, the CEC published a [decision](#) determining the number of seats in the multi-member constituencies. The 2022 amendments to the Election Code postponed the establishment of a separate constituency for out-of-country voters until January 2025; subsequent amendments postponed its entry into force until January 2028.

¹⁵ The last [Population and Housing Census](#) was held in 2021.

¹⁶ In total 493 PECs were established abroad in 55 countries.

¹⁷ There was no gender-disaggregated data on the composition of election management bodies. Paragraph 48(d) of [CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23](#) states that "State parties should include statistical data, disaggregated by sex, showing the percentage of women relative to men who enjoy those rights".

without consent, limited availability, low remuneration, or withdrawal by nominating entities.¹⁸ Resignation of PEC members did not follow a uniform pattern across the country. The lack of deadlines for political entities to submit replacement lists further complicated the process.

Technical and logistical preparations for the elections were completed in compliance with all legal deadlines. These included, among other measures, the centralized production of voting screens at the regional level for the first time, ensuring standardization in line with CEC requirements, as well as the production of ballot papers and paper rolls subject to rigorous security and audit procedures. The CEC and DEC members ensured transparency by holding regular public sessions, which were accessible to observers, including through uninterrupted live streaming or recordings. In addition, the CEC held substantive discussions as part of its sessions and decided on many substantive and practical issues pertaining to the electoral process, and most election materials and decisions were posted on their respective websites in a timely manner. However, no sign language interpretation or closed captioning was provided for live or recorded CEC sessions, and the CEC website offered only basic accessibility features such as adjustable font size.¹⁹

While the law mandates that DEC members train the lower-level commissioners, the CEC provided them with guidance only in the final week of March through a series of online sessions. The CEC still lacked a designated training unit, which hindered the consistency and effectiveness of training.²⁰ PEC training sessions, conducted both in-person and online, took place from early April until just days before the elections. Some political parties supplemented DEC training by conducting training for their own PEC members. The PEC in-person training sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM were generally limited to one hour and covered key aspects of election day procedures; however, the scope and depth varied.²¹ The introduction of newly developed online results software, in line with a previous ODIHR recommendation, provided a potentially useful tool to support participants. However, the completion of results protocols was not consistently covered during the training. Attendance was uneven, with several observations noting that participants left before the sessions concluded, particularly in cases where it appeared that a majority of attendees had prior experience.²²

The CEC conducted an extensive and comprehensive public awareness campaign nationwide addressing key issues related to voting rights and registration, use of electronic voting machines (EVMs), as well as voting arrangements for persons with disabilities.²³ The main video messages included sign language interpretation and closed captioning, enhancing access for persons with hearing impairments. In addition, the CEC conducted a targeted youth voter awareness campaign.²⁴ Several polling stations within each constituency should be accessible for voters with visual impairments and reduced mobility,

¹⁸ The CEC recommended in its 2025 report to set such a deadline closer to elections to prevent resignation ahead of elections. The CEC [decision](#) of 4 March further aimed to ensure the legal provisions would be strictly applied, requiring that any cancellation be properly justified. In a separate decision, the CEC determined that specific PEC members who demonstrate proficiency and accuracy in performing their duties may receive a cumulative bonus of up to 20 per cent of the initial indemnity.

¹⁹ The website only partially complies with the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG).

²⁰ See Paragraph 84 of the [2002 Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) (Explanatory Report).

²¹ The ODIHR EOM observed 13 in-person PEC training sessions in Dolni Dabnik (DEC 15), General Toshevo (DEC 8), Kuklen (DEC 17), Nikolaevo (DEC 27), Plovdiv city (DEC 16), Sliven (DEC 21), Slivo Pole (DEC 19), Sofia (DEC 24), Tundzha (DEC 31), Varna (DEC 3), Vetovo (DEC 19) and Yablanitsa (DEC 11).

²² The [online result protocol](#) replicates the PEC protocol per constituency. The mobile application eProtocol aims to assist in filling out the PEC protocols. The [ballot paper counting test](#) was designed for electoral officials to verify their knowledge in recognizing valid and invalid votes.

²³ The CEC held weekly press conferences, and the Commission chairperson and spokesperson participated in several extensive interviews on mainstream television programmes since the start of the campaign.

²⁴ The CEC published a letter to [youth voters](#), organized a special event demonstrating the use of EVMs for the youth, and opened an Instagram account at the beginning of March.

including the availability of tactile ballot templates to facilitate the use of ballot papers.²⁵ On 3 April, a co-ordinated forum chaired by the Ombudsperson reviewed options to assist voters with visual impairments, resulting in the introduction of QR codes in all polling stations, enabling access to candidate lists in audio format via the CEC website. According to the CEC, 1,251 in-country polling stations were fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

Voting Technologies

The Election Code mandates the use of EVMs in all polling stations with at least 300 registered voters, with voters able to choose between a machine and a paper ballot.²⁶ Paper ballots were used exclusively in polling stations with fewer than 300 registered voters, in special polling stations, or in cases of EVM malfunction. Consequently, of the 11,836 in-country polling stations, 9,354 stations were equipped with EVMs.²⁷ However, some election materials, including voting machines, were not adapted for persons with visual or cognitive impairments, at odds with international standards and good practice.²⁸ However, the IEOM interlocutors highlighted that EVMs produce only a paper record of the vote, similar to a printing machine, which they considered to differ from the intended purpose of such devices.

The certification of EVMs comprised two main processes: verification of EVM conformity, conducted by the Ministry of Electronic Government (MEG) from 30 March to 1 April using a specific methodology, and the trusted build of the EVM software on 3 April, which completed the process.²⁹ Both stages were conducted in a transparent manner and were accessible to accredited representatives of political entities and observers, including international. The EVMs were installed with the certified software in a timely manner.³⁰ Nevertheless, several ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns regarding the CEC's limited institutional role of the CEC in the management of EVMs and the broader use of technology in elections, noting challenges in establishing an EVM unit in line with the Election Code.

The video live streaming and recording system functioned throughout the counting process.³¹ Software updates, developed by Information Services (IS) under MEG's responsibility, began in March and introduced additional features to improve usability, including the option to send alert messages if the system was not properly activated. While the Election Code does not provide for specific sanctions for failure to conduct recordings, the CEC did not report any instances of non-compliance with this requirement.

As required by law, the processing of voting results was assigned to IS. The law does not provide for independent certification of the result management system, contrary to international good practice and

²⁵ See the [decision](#) from 24 March which regulates co-operation between local authorities and DEC's to facilitate voting by persons with disabilities through ensuring accessibility, visual aids, transportation, and voter information.

²⁶ The private company, Ciela Norma, which has provided EVMs manufactured by Smartmatic in previous elections since 2021, signed its contract with the CEC on 18 March. Ciela Norma was the only company that submitted a bid. Responsibilities of Ciela Norma include carrying out maintenance activities, updating EVM software, managing logistics and deployment, and providing the CEC with associated training and voter information outlets.

²⁷ Out of 493 polling stations abroad, across 55 countries, 129 were equipped with EVMs. The CEC and Ciela Norma estimated that 11,528 of the 12,837 machines purchased in 2021 were operational.

²⁸ EVM manufacturer, Smartmatic, indicates in its technical specifications that features suitable for users with visual and hearing impairments can be made available on all machines. According to the CEC, such options were not implemented due to cost considerations. See Articles 9 and 29 of the [CRPD](#).

²⁹ During these stages, the MEG, the National Institute of Standardization (NIS), and the National Institute of Metrology (NIM) confirmed compliance with legal and technical requirements through testing and documentation checks. Under CEC supervision, the process included building the software from source code in a controlled environment and generating a hash code printed on all control receipts and machine ballots on election day.

³⁰ Ciela Norma prepared EVMs for the out-of-country voting on 7 and 8 April, and for in-country voting starting 14 April. To ensure that EVMs complied with the relevant technical requirements, the MEG deployed external experts.

³¹ It includes, among others, the developments of both a mobile application and an online platform to host two videos.

prior ODIHR recommendations.³² However, the CEC and IS conducted public demonstrations of the system on 7 April, attended by accredited political entities and observers, including a presentation of a review of the system's source code, aimed at enhancing transparency.

Voting Rights and Registration

Citizens aged 18 and over have the right to vote.³³ The law maintains blanket restrictions on suffrage rights for those deprived of legal capacity by a final court decision, including persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, as well as persons serving a prison sentence, regardless of the gravity of the offence.³⁴ These restrictions are at odds with international standards and good practice on universal and equal suffrage, and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) jurisprudence.³⁵ On 23 March 2026, the blanket restriction on voting rights for prisoners was challenged before the Constitutional Court, with the applicant arguing that such a restriction should be considered on a case-by-case basis; however, the appeal was not admitted.³⁶

All eligible voters with a registered permanent address are automatically included in voter lists, which are compiled by municipal administrations ahead of each election based on data from the National Population Register maintained by the Directorate General of Civil Registration and Administrative Services (GRAO) of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. The October 2024 amendment to the Citizens' Registration Act enabled approximately 27,060 eligible voters to be included in the provisional voter list.³⁷ However, this measure was not complemented by proactive public information campaigns to increase awareness. According to the MoI, as of 10 February 2026, an estimated 82,074 citizens aged 18 and over did not have a valid identification document, potentially preventing them from participating in the elections.³⁸

The preliminary voter lists, comprising 6,641,768 voters, including 121,708 first-time voters, were open for public scrutiny from 9 March to 4 April, during which voters could request a change of address or inclusion at their current residence, while certain categories could apply for absentee voting certificates

³² See paragraphs 4, 7 and 8 of the [2022 Council of Europe's Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology \(ICT\) in the electoral processes](#) which require transparency and evaluation of the ICT systems. See also [Venice Commission Interpretative Declaration of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters as concerns Digital Technologies and Artificial Intelligence](#), paragraph 27 c.

³³ Voting is compulsory; however, following a 2017 Constitutional Court judgment, no sanctions are in place.

³⁴ These were 9,525 citizens, due to legal capacity; 4,311 citizens who were serving a sentence.

³⁵ Paragraphs 7.3 and 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) state that participating States will "guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens," and that "...any restriction on rights and freedoms must, in a democratic society, relate to one of the objectives of the applicable law and be strictly proportionate to the aim of that law". Paragraph 14 of the [1996 UNHRC General Comment No. 25](#) states that grounds for deprivation of voting rights should be "objective and reasonable." Deprivation of the right to vote on the basis of intellectual incapacity is inconsistent with Articles 12 and 29 of the [CRPD](#). Paragraph 48 of the [2022 General Comment No 1 to Article 12](#) of the CRPD states that "a person's decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising [...] the right to vote [and] the right to stand for election". [The 2002 Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) Section 1.1.d provides that "provision may be made for clauses suspending political rights. Such clauses must, however, comply with the usual conditions under which fundamental rights may be restricted; in other words, they must: (a) be provided for by law; (b) observe the principle of proportionality; (c) be based on mental incapacity or a criminal conviction for a serious offence. See also the ECtHR judgements: [Kulinski and Sabev v. Bulgaria](#), [Marinov v. Bulgaria](#), [Dimov and others v. Bulgaria](#) and [Tingarov and Others v. Bulgaria](#).

³⁶ See the [appeal](#). See also the Constitutional Court [decision](#) on inadmissibility, 7 April 2026.

³⁷ According to GRAO, following the introduction of the "business address" concept, 27,060 individuals were registered with such an address as their permanent residence and added to the voter list (58 per cent men), while 20,339 Bulgarian citizens over 18 lack an accurate permanent address and an identification card, preventing their inclusion, with around 55 per cent of them being women.

³⁸ The MoI has [announced](#) on 19 March measures to accelerate the issuance of identification cards ahead of elections.

(AVCs) to vote at any polling station.³⁹ Each municipality compiled special voter lists for voters who requested mobile voting or to vote in special polling stations in healthcare and social-service institutions and pre-trial detention centres. Special polling stations were also set up for voters with reduced mobility.⁴⁰

The final voter lists, printed by GRAO, included 6,575,151 voters.⁴¹ While the accuracy of the voter lists was not questioned by the ODIHR EOM interlocutors, some expressed concerns about the high rate of voter registration among the Bulgarian diaspora, noting that it could lead to misinterpretation of turnout, increased planning costs, and a heightened risk of irregularities on election day, including attempts by third parties to vote on behalf of registered voters living abroad.

Candidate Rights and Registration

Eligible voters who are at least 21 years of age can stand for elections. In line with prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendation, constitutional amendments removed restrictions on candidates holding dual citizenship. At the same time, an 18-month residency requirement was imposed on prospective candidates, contrary to international standards and good practice.⁴² Candidates may be nominated on the lists of registered political parties or coalitions, or run independently in a single constituency, supported by nomination committees composed of three to seven voters.⁴³

The candidate registration was conducted in two phases by the CEC and the DEC. Between 24 February and 4 March, the CEC received requests to register political parties, accompanied by a minimum of 2,500 supporting signatures from eligible voters and a deposit of EUR 1,278. By the 9 March deadline, the DEC had registered 2 nomination committees for the registration of individual candidates upon submission of supporting signatures of at least 1 per cent of registered voters in the constituency, but not more than 1,000 signatures, and a deposit of EUR 51. By 17 March, the DEC, in co-operation with GRAO, verified registration documents and candidate lists. During this process, GRAO identified candidates who did not comply with the age and residency requirements or who had been registered in more than two constituencies.⁴⁴

In an inclusive and transparent process, the CEC registered 14 political parties and 10 coalitions.⁴⁵ These included a total of 4,786 candidates and 744 candidate lists, as well as 1 independent candidate. In total, 1,439 women were registered, representing 30 per cent of all candidates; and 24 per cent of the lists were led by women. The ODIHR EOM did not receive information about candidates with disabilities who participated in these elections. Registration was denied to one party and coalition due to deficiencies in supporting signatures, in line with the legal requirement. On 18 March, the CEC held a public draw to determine the order of the 24 contestants on the ballot.

³⁹ Voters could check their data online via the websites of the municipalities or the website of [GRAO](#) or the [CEC](#). According to these institutions, approximately 80,000 and 20,000 eligible voters requested to vote, respectively, at their current address (mainly students) and with the use of an AVC.

⁴⁰ The MEG proposed a series of [e-services](#) enabling citizens to update their voter registration status.

⁴¹ Some 57,968 citizens who applied to vote from abroad were removed from the final voter list.

⁴² Paragraph 15 of the [UN ICCPR General Comment 25](#) states that “any restrictions on the right to stand for election, [...], must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria. Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation”. See also paragraph 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) and the [2002 Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#), I.1.1.c.III and IV.

⁴³ Individuals prohibited from membership in political parties, such as military personnel, members of the security services, diplomats, judges, and prosecutors, may contest elections as independent candidates.

⁴⁴ One candidate held 2 nationalities and did not meet the 18-month residency requirement. GRAO also noted that 19 candidates held more than 1 nationality. While these decisions were aligned with the letter of the amended Constitution, the lack of a nuanced judicial assessment regarding the candidates’ actual ties to the country could be a disproportionate restriction on suffrage rights.

⁴⁵ On 19 March, the CEC [published the provisional list of candidates](#) with about 1,019 candidates standing in 2 candidate lists.

Campaign Environment

The official campaign started on 20 March, while the campaign silence period, including the prohibition of publishing opinion polls, took effect 24 hours before election day. The fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression were respected, and overall, contestants were able to campaign freely.⁴⁶

The legal framework contains some regulations aimed at preventing the misuse of administrative resources during the campaign, but does not address campaigning by public officials, beyond requiring impartiality and separation from official duties during working hours. The ODIHR EOM observed that some public officials, mostly from local authorities across the political spectrum, endorsed candidates and took part in campaign events during working hours, at odds with paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.⁴⁷ In addition, statements by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy warned about the alleged pressure on voters, including through the use of social welfare programmes or public sector employment; it also announced country-wide detention of individuals inflicted in vote buying (see Electoral Dispute Resolution). The ODIHR EOM also received credible information about similar allegations in Belitsa, Kardzhali, and Ruse.⁴⁸

Campaign activities were prominent throughout the campaign period, with the main political contestants, largely current parliamentary parties, as well as the newly formed coalition Progressive Bulgaria (PB), led by the former President Rumen Radev, actively engaging voters through localized or large-scale rallies, meetings with voters, and social media presence. Campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM proceeded largely unobstructed and attracted supporters and other participants, who frequently engaged with candidates.⁴⁹ The campaign environment remained highly polarized, with strong negative messaging and verbal attacks among the contestants.⁵⁰ DPS and GERB claimed that intensified investigations by the MoI into vote buying and voter intimidation disproportionately targeted them. Several parties used rhetoric that could be perceived as inciting violence against opponent

⁴⁶ The ODIHR EOM was informed about the court case initiated by the GERB candidate in Razgrad being allegedly dismissed from his local administration position by the newly appointed governor. PB member in Varna informed the ODIHR EOM of instances of distribution of a fake sticker with a wrong list number. Case of alleged intimidation was reported in Samokov with a teacher introducing PB candidates at campaign events reportedly being pressured by the chief regional school inspector to stop such activities.

⁴⁷ The ODIHR EOM observed GERB leader often campaigning together with mayors expressing gratitude to him for local infrastructure projects. Mayor of Lom showed the renovated hall and stated that “the people from Lom are grateful”. Mayor of Plovdiv spoke at the campaign event during working hours with business owners warning them that all projects would stop if there was a change of power. Mayors of Varna and Blagoevgrad endorsed PP-DB. The Blagoevgrad mayor campaigned with the PP-DB party, distributing small flowerpots and the party newspaper. Paragraph 5.4 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that “a clear separation between the State and political parties; in particular, political parties will not be merged with the State”. See also [ODIHR and Venice Commission’s Joint Guidelines on Preventing and Responding to the Misuse of Administrative Resources During Electoral Processes](#), Section 4.1.

⁴⁸ On 25 March, the MoI detained in Kardzhali a provincial post office head for allegedly pressuring aid workers to influence voters to vote for DPS; on 26 March, the minister stated that party members, led by a mayor and parliamentary candidate for DPS, attempted to enter the police building to secure his release. The DPS mayor of the village of Ovcharovo, in the municipality of Targovishte, was arrested for distributing sums of 30 and 40 euros to residents in exchange for their votes.

⁴⁹ The ODIHR EOM observed 30 campaign events across 12 municipalities. Among these, ten events were organized by PB, seven by BSP, five by GERB, four by PP-DB, three by Revival, and one by Greatness, mirroring the general prominence of the parties’ campaigns. Of these events, 17 featured women speakers, 19 were accessible to persons with physical disabilities, but none included sign-language interpretation. At events observed by the ODIHR EOM, youth participation averaged at 14 per cent, while women constituted 43 per cent of the audience.

⁵⁰ PP-DB leader Asen Vasilev [called](#) Rumen Radev “cowardly hypocrite” while Rumen Radev [called](#) PP-DB “liars and manipulators”.

political actors.⁵¹ Main campaign messages revolved around energy, foreign policy, corruption, the cost of living, infrastructure, the integrity of the electoral process, and criticism of the government's activities, notably the defense agreement signed with Ukraine. Some political actors, namely DPS and ITN, promoted narratives targeting civil society organizations, portraying them as acting against national interests and family values. The ODIHR EOM observed instances of defacement of campaign materials and party infrastructure.⁵²

There are no internal party measures nor legal requirements promoting women as candidates. Few parties promoted women candidates, and even fewer campaigned on topics related to women's political participation.⁵³ Positively, in more than half of the campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM, women featured as prominent speakers. The ODIHR EOM was made aware of several instances of gender-based attacks and smear campaigns.⁵⁴ The LGBTI community was a target of an attack, inciting violence against them.⁵⁵ One of the party leaders was a target of a smear campaign related to their alleged sexual orientation. Campaign messages targeting youth emphasized social benefits proposed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), while We Continue the Change, in coalition with Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB), frequently referred to the protests that led to early elections, attributing them to youth dissatisfaction with the political system. A number of parties were actively promoting youth candidates in their campaign, while GERB and PP-DB reached out to the so-called "Generation Z" in their campaign messages.

Social networks and personal blogs, although unregulated as media services, played a significant role in the campaign. Contestants were affected by Meta's and Google's paid political advertising bans. The ODIHR EOM identified 15 groups that, since the beginning of the year, had changed their names to include the name of Rumen Radev or PB.⁵⁶ These groups predominantly shared content characterized by pro-Russian and anti-European narratives, covering both domestic and international topics, with some posts replicated across multiple groups and a smaller proportion promoting Rumen Radev or PB. The ODIHR EOM also identified a network of 6 groups with over 350,000 members that are either managed by or share many posts from the profile called "*national unity*", which features links to *bnews.bg*. These groups feature posts with anti-European and pro-Russian sentiment, criticizing DPS leader, GERB, and PP-DB, while promoting Rumen Radev.⁵⁷ A widely referenced civil society report

⁵¹ According to the [CEC decisions](#), The Truth and Only the Truth candidate Ventsislav Angelov violated public decency through verbal aggression and threats toward several politicians, members of the caretaker government and CEC members. When asked by the anchor what would happen when his party comes into power, he showed gallows and said, "I'll tell you what will happen. These gallows, [...], it will hang on the necks of Borisov, Peevski and Rumen Radev." MECh MP candidate [referred](#) to GERB, DPS and ITN leaders that "they deserved to be treated as they do in Nepal, to be thrown out of the windows". In a separate [decision](#), the CEC found that The Truth and Only the Truth candidate Atanas Stefanov used aggressive and inflammatory language during a radio appearance on Radio Sofia on 6 April, stating: "servants of Zionists, anathema of the Zionists, they will have to live, work, sleep in the uranium mines, where they belong and this is where their graves will be".

⁵² These were observed in Blagoevgrad, Pleven, Stara Zagora and Veliko Tarnovo.

⁵³ Campaign programmes of only two prominent contestants addressed issues related to women electorate, albeit only to women's role as mothers and, in case of one platform, as entrepreneurs. Women's participation in the observed campaign events differed across parties.

⁵⁴ Women candidates from PP-DB and GERB were targeted with derogative comments under their Facebook posts. Another PP-DB candidate was attacked by the news outlet [PIK](#) for her appearance. In one case, the Revival used the party leader's interview to post a denigrating AI-generated image in which the woman journalist is depicted as a turkey draped in the flags of the United States and Ukraine and referred to as "turkey". In Sliven, the party leader of the Revival used disparaging remarks about PP-DB woman candidate's physical appearance.

⁵⁵ Leader of Revival Kostadin Kostadinov shared an animated video on his Facebook account in which he praised the 2024 law forbidding "homosexual propaganda" calling it anti-human ideology. See ODIHR [Opinion](#) concluding that the mentioned law unduly impacts the exercise of several fundamental rights.

⁵⁶ Facebook group "Second-hand Auto parts" changed its name to "Rumen Radev the New Prime Minister". Further examples include group "Bulgarians love Russia" to "With Rumen Radev and PB!", "The change continues" to "PB", "Bulgaria and Russia are brotherly nations" to "For the future of Bulgaria with President Rumen Radev". To date, these groups have had over 350,000 followers.

⁵⁷ PB maintained that they do not associate with these pages.

monitoring the campaign on social media, which was criticized by some political actors, indicated that the increase in pro-Radev content across Facebook and TikTok exceeded that observed for other political actors.⁵⁸ Disinformation narratives actively circulated online and were exploited by some contestants in a fear-mongering manner to reinforce their policy positions or to discredit their political opponents.⁵⁹

The government launched initiatives to prevent, detect, and protect the election infrastructure and the campaign from foreign interference, disinformation, and cyberattacks. The co-ordination mechanism was established between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the MoI, and the MEG, with the MoI taking a lead for potential disinformation, foreign interference and cyber threats. The MFA established a temporary unit to co-ordinate the response to foreign interference, while the MEG co-ordinated activities related to critical infrastructure. No structured or comprehensive initiatives were identified to educate voters on the risks of disinformation and manipulative content; however, authorities provided information through dedicated press conferences, representing an initial effort to raise awareness. The country's representation in Brussels requested the activation of the Rapid Alert System of the European Commission and the EU External Action Service, aimed at supporting member states in addressing disinformation. This development was referenced in the campaign by some contestants.⁶⁰ While no threats or interference were reported by these structures, voter awareness of their methodologies and procedures was lacking in the lead-up to the elections.

In November 2025, the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) was designated as Digital Services Co-ordinator (DSC) in response to the requirements of the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) under the Law of Electronic Communication.⁶¹ The DSA-related activities are shared among the competent authorities, CRC, and the Council for Electronic Media (CEM), while the Commission for Personal Data Protection (CPDP) oversees the processing of personal data. However, the required instruction co-ordinating the implementation of the DSA has not been finalized. In practice, the incomplete implementation of the DSA framework, including the complaints mechanism, limited oversight of systemic risks. The delay in the full implementation of the DSA was attributed by the ODIHR EOM interlocutors to late legislative changes, political instability, and overall lack of political will, which resulted in the failure to appoint vetted researchers and trusted flaggers, key elements for analyzing the online environment.

⁵⁸ According to the [“TikTokcracy Tracker”](#) report refers to the network of accounts operating on behalf of DPS-NN as demanding particular scrutiny given the volume, uniformity, and co-ordination of their output. It also notes the co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour across platforms, purchased Facebook pages, and the use of opponents' hashtags to divert engagement within a click-driven online environment. PP-DB informed the ODIHR EOM that their hashtags were hijacked, resulting in decreased engagement. On 8 April, TikTok [published](#) that the platform disrupted a network of 34 accounts with 66,763 followers artificially amplifying narratives in support of the DPS-NN. According to [Factcheck.bg](#), 120 inauthentic Facebook profiles were identified as artificially amplifying content related to ITN. The Center for the Study of Democracy [reported](#) a cross-border disinformation campaign in which 41 articles across 20 Bulgarian outlets amplified a former MP's claim that the caretaker government is “pro-Soros,” undermining its efforts against vote buying. It also identified coordinated attempts to weaken the MFA's mechanism for countering disinformation. On April 4, Russia Today published [the article](#) framing the activation of the EU's Rapid Alert System as “censorship” and “interference in elections”.

⁵⁹ Government's defence-agreement with Ukraine was portrayed as obliging Bulgarian pupils to learn Ukrainian language in schools. A written note handed by the Embassy of Iran to the government was portrayed as the involvement of Bulgaria in the war. The Petrohan case, in which the bodies of six persons living together and described as practicing Buddhists and environmentalists were discovered at two remote locations, was widely exploited by ITN to portray PP-DB as part of the sect and as “supporters of paedophiles”. The Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media which serves as the European Digital Media Observatory-related hub covering Bulgaria and Romania [noted](#) co-ordinated digital ecosystem where the legitimacy of state institutions was being systematically challenged.

⁶⁰ For example, Rumen Radev criticized the government's actions in this regard, and representatives of PP-DB alleging that they attempt to manipulate the electoral process through claims of foreign interference.

⁶¹ See the [press release](#) published by the European Commission.

The Rapid Response System under the Code of Conduct on Disinformation was activated, enabling the rapid exchange of information between civil society, fact-checking organizations, and online platforms. Civil society initiatives to monitor and analyze election-related risks were particularly relevant in this context. The ODIHR EOM monitored the campaign on social networks for a qualitative assessment of its narrative and tone.⁶² Strong social media presence was a prominent feature of most contestants' campaign strategies, with Facebook as the dominant platform, followed by TikTok and YouTube. Posts mainly focused on promoting candidates and criticizing opponents. Corruption and oligarchic structures were key topics, along with foreign policy, the economy, energy, the rule of law, and rising living costs. PB recorded the highest level of aggregate engagements across platforms, with approximately 1,283,000 aggregate engagements, followed by PP-DB (854,000), Glow (648,000), and Revival (568,000). In terms of video views on TikTok and YouTube combined, PB also recorded the highest number of views, with over 6.6 million views, followed by PP-DB (3.4 million), Greatness (711,000), and MECh (702,000).

Campaign Finance

The legislative framework governing party and campaign finance remains unchanged, with prior ODIHR recommendations unaddressed, including the lack of reporting on expenditures before election day and the limited scope of oversight by the National Audit Office (NAO). In addition, at odds with international standards and prior ODIHR recommendations, the law does not regulate third-party campaigning. While only political parties may formally participate in elections, expenditures by third parties are not subject to campaign finance rules, creating potential loopholes through which unlimited funding could otherwise be channeled, and financial transactions can be veiled.⁶³ Online political advertising is not subject to comprehensive disclosure requirements, further limiting transparency. Overall, the existing campaign finance framework provides limited transparency and oversight.⁶⁴

Parties and coalitions that received at least one and four per cent of the valid votes nationwide in the previous elections, respectively, are entitled to annual public funding, which may be used for campaign purposes.⁶⁵ The amount of public subsidy is calculated based on the cost per vote determined annually in the state budget. Political parties and independent candidates not entitled to annual public funding receive a subsidy of approximately EUR 20,000 and EUR 2,500 for media coverage.⁶⁶ Campaigns may be financed by contestants' own funds and by monetary or in-kind donations from natural persons. There is no cap on individual donations, heightening the risks of dependence on wealthy private interests. Donations exceeding EUR 511 must be made by bank transfer, and those exceeding one minimum monthly wage (approximately EUR 620) must be accompanied by a declaration on the origin of the funds.⁶⁷ Available online data for these elections indicate a concentration of donations clustered

⁶² The ODIHR EOM monitored 60 accounts of political parties, coalitions, political leaders and candidates, state institutions and officials and qualitatively analyzed posts of 14 influencers, prominent figures, and civic movements.

⁶³ Paragraph 256 of the [ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that "It is important that some forms of regulation, with comparable obligations and restrictions as apply to parties and party candidates, be extended to third parties that are involved in the campaign, to ensure transparency and accountability. Third parties should be subjected to similar rules on donations and spending as political parties to avoid situations where third parties can be used to circumvent campaign finance regulations".

⁶⁴ GRECO has [previously noted](#) that most recommendations related to party funding and corruption prevention have been largely addressed, but criticized the lack of reporting on expenditures before election-day and the limited oversight mandate of the NAO.

⁶⁵ In 2025, four political parties and 5 coalitions received direct public funding. See also United Nations, Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, [Resolution 11/7](#): Preventing and combating corruption through enhancing transparency in the funding of political parties, candidatures for elected public office, and electoral campaigns.

⁶⁶ On 18 March, the CEC [determined](#) the allocation to 9 parties with the total amount of EUR 184,065.12 and 7 coalitions with the total amount of EUR 126,118.10; 1 independent candidate will receive EUR 2,556.46.

⁶⁷ According to paragraph 19 of the [1996 UN Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 25](#) "reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters

just below this threshold, with a significant number of contributions in the range of EUR 500 to 600, which raises concern over the perceived attempts to bypass additional disclosure requirements.

Contributions from legal entities, religious institutions, anonymous or foreign sources are prohibited. The legislation allows political parties to obtain bank loans, which may not exceed two-thirds of the party's revenue for the preceding calendar year. Campaign expenditure is capped at EUR 1,533,876 for parties and coalitions and EUR 102,258 for independent candidates.

Oversight of political and campaign finance is exercised by the NAO. Contestants were required to disclose to the NAO their donations within seven days from receipt and contracts concluded with the media prior to the elections.⁶⁸ At the time of reporting, 8 out of 24 registered parties and coalitions reported receiving private donations, while the independent candidate reported none.⁶⁹ Contrary to prior ODIHR recommendations, contestants are not required to submit financial reports before election day; instead, they must submit final reports within 30 days after the elections, which the NAO publishes within 15 days of receipt and subsequently audits within 6 months.⁷⁰ This delay in reporting undermines transparency and accountability, as timely disclosure is essential to prevent undue influence and ensure a level playing field.⁷¹ The effectiveness of oversight is further constrained by the NAO's predominantly formal and reactive mandate, which relies largely on contestants' self-reporting and lacks capacity for real-time verification.⁷²

Media

The media landscape is diverse, yet elections were held against a backdrop of concerns regarding declining journalistic independence and diminishing public trust in the media. Despite legal guarantees, longstanding, unaddressed political and economic influence over media outlets resulted in editorial interference and journalists' self-censorship. The removal of a journalist from *bTV* in December 2025 was widely perceived by the ODIHR EOM interlocutors as an instance of undue influence contributing to concerns about media independence. Moreover, the prolonged, dispute-marred election of the new Director General of the Bulgarian National Television (BNT), concluded by the CEM on 20 February 2026, was viewed by several ODIHR EOM interlocutors as highlighting vulnerabilities in the appointment mechanism, including the political influence over public media governance.⁷³

The Constitution provides for freedom of expression and access to information; however, defamation remains a criminal offence, despite prior ODIHR recommendations.⁷⁴ In addition, political instability has left key provisions protecting editorial independence under the European Media Freedom Act

is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party". See also paragraph 213 and 263 of [ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#).

⁶⁸ Contestants must report to the NAO the origin of donations received before the start of the election campaign within five days of its opening, and those received during the campaign within seven days of receipt.

⁶⁹ The largest volume of donations was reported by PB (EUR 963,740), followed by DPS (EUR 300,000), while Anticorruption Bloc reported the lowest level of private contributions (EUR 700).

⁷⁰ Article 7(3) of the [UNCAC](#) obliges signatory states to make good-faith efforts to improve transparency in candidate and political party financing. Disclosure requirements for political financing are the main policy instruments for achieving such transparency. Paragraph 261 of the [ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that "[i]t is good practice to require [...] reports [...] on campaign incomes and expenses of parties and candidates several days before election day."

⁷¹ See paragraph 259 of the [ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#).

⁷² As provided by the [ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#), "monitoring can be undertaken by a variety of different bodies and may include an internal independent auditing of party accounts by certified experts or a single public supervision body with a clear mandate, appropriate authority and adequate resources. See Article 14 of the [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE](#).

⁷³ On 13 February 2026, after more than three years of deadlock during which the CEM, divided along political quota lines, was unable to reach a majority vote, the Supreme Administrative Court [declared](#) the appeals inadmissible.

⁷⁴ Paragraph 47 of the [General Comment No. 34 to the ICCPR](#) calls States to "consider the decriminalization of defamation".

unimplemented.⁷⁵ The Ministry of Justice is currently transposing the EU directive on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), which aims to curb costly strategic lawsuits persistently used against critical and investigative media.⁷⁶

Election coverage was governed by agreements negotiated between contesting parties and media outlets, and was largely limited to pre-agreed formats.⁷⁷ This framework reduced the scope for editorial coverage, particularly in online outlets, and potentially led to structural self-censorship to maintain such agreements.⁷⁸ In addition, the CEC allocated media packages to non-subsidized parties and coalitions.⁷⁹ The campaign was largely excluded from newscasts, which are among the most-watched TV programmes. While these agreements are intended to ensure equitable access for contestants, their combined effect may have restricted voters' access to comprehensive and critical information through news coverage, necessary for making a fully informed choice, while also undermining editorial independence.⁸⁰

According to the ODIHR EOM media monitoring, media broadly covered the campaign through debates, talk shows, and interviews, although the campaign increasingly shifted to social media.⁸¹ A significant part of the coverage was aired outside of prime time. Televisions, radio channels and an independent online media hosted debates, however Rumen Radev and Boyko Borisov (GERB-SDS) consistently avoided direct participation, while DPS declined participation as a whole. Direct speech accounted for some 75 per cent of the coverage of contestants and partially lacked critical questioning and in-depth analysis. Overall, this limited media scrutiny of primary candidates and diminished voters' ability to make informed choices. The public broadcasters generally abided by their legal obligations to grant free and paid airtime to all contestants. They provided respectively some 26 hours of free and 6 hours of paid coverage (81 and 19 per cent) combined. Paid content included interviews that required journalistic work, blurring the line between campaign messaging and independent reporting. Private media focused their coverage on parliamentary parties and contestants leading in the opinion polls, mainly through free coverage, and maintained a neutral tone throughout the campaign. All monitored broadcasters substantially reported on election preparation and voter information. Women, who accounted for 30 per cent of all candidates, were underrepresented with less than 12 per cent of the airtime. In online media, coverage was often shaped by agreements with contestants, and reporting frequently relied on quote-based content. *Blitz.bg*, in particular, editorially amplified such trends.

By 16 April, the CEM sent 17 alerts to the CEC based on its monitoring of compliance with the Election Code.⁸² The majority related to minor procedural shortcomings, including non-publication of mandatory agreements. The CEC has issued substantiated decisions on three alerts concerning campaign content and potential breaches of rules on good morals. Taken together, these elements suggest that media largely operated within the legal framework. The ODIHR EOM interlocutors generally welcomed the

⁷⁵ This includes reforms of transparency of ownership, state advertising allocation, and self-regulatory mechanisms.

⁷⁶ In April 2026, the businessman Nikolay Filipov filed ten new lawsuits against the investigative journalist Dimitar Stoyanov of *BIRD.bg*, including five cases with frozen assets totalling EUR 25,000. According to the [Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria](#), these cases bear the signs of SLAPP procedures, which Nikolay Filipov denied.

⁷⁷ Article 180 of Election Code limits campaign coverage to coverage conducted under paid or gracious agreements.

⁷⁸ At least 1 media outlet saw a party ending a contract during the campaign period over a critical article.

⁷⁹ In total 9 parties, 7 coalitions, and 1 initiative committee [received](#) media packages ranging from EUR 2,556.46 to EUR 20,451.68, divided among [approved advertising contracts](#).

⁸⁰ Article 3 of the [European Media Freedom Act](#) calls on Member States to “respect the right of recipients of media services to have access to a plurality of editorially independent media content [...] to the benefit of free and democratic discourse”, while paragraph 25 of [General Comment No. 25](#) to the ICCPR reminds that “in order to ensure the full enjoyment of rights [...], the free communication of information and ideas about public and political issues between citizens, candidates and elected representatives is essential.”

⁸¹ The ODIHR EOM media monitoring included morning and evening shows of public television *BNT1* and radio *BNR*; private television channels *bTV*, *Nova TV*, and radio station *Darik*; and news portals *mediapool.bg*, *actualno.bg*, *novini.bg*, and *blitz.bg*.

⁸² The CEM identified violations of articles 179, 180, 183, 187, and 205 of the Electoral Code.

appointment of media professionals to its board but noted that the selection mechanism does not sufficiently safeguard its independence.

Participation of Persons Belonging to Minorities

The Constitution guarantees the right of self-identification but does not define the concept of minorities.⁸³ While it prohibits discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds, the Constitution emphasizes national unity and prohibits political parties based on ethnic, racial, or religious lines. Additional legal norms regulate the exercise of civil and political rights.⁸⁴ However, legislation requires that election campaigns be conducted only in the Bulgarian language, contrary to prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations and international standards.⁸⁵

In 2024, a leadership dispute within the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) led to the formation of Alliance for Rights and Freedoms (APS).⁸⁶ This development contributed to tensions during the campaign. APS informed the ODIHR EOM that some of its supporters feared potential retaliation from DPS-controlled local authorities if they attended APS events. Provisions or proposals specifically related to minority issues were limited in party platforms. In their platform, Revival opposed the right to self-determination and the use of one's mother tongue, the right to cultural autonomy, and the right to form associations based on minority status. Most parliamentary parties, as well as PB, fielded candidates belonging to minorities; however, the ODIHR EOM observed minority candidates as speakers only at the PP-DB campaign events. PB actively sought to engage minority communities by organizing campaign events across the country.

Electoral Dispute Resolution

Election disputes fall under the jurisdiction of both the election commissions and the administrative courts. Decisions of lower-level election commissions may be appealed to higher-level commissions and, depending on the nature of the complaint, further to the competent administrative court or to the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) as the final instance. Complaints may be filed by subjects who can substantiate a legal interest by having their electoral rights affected, while alerts on alleged violations may be submitted by any citizen.⁸⁷ The Election Code provides for expedited procedures, with deadlines ranging from three days to one hour on election day. However, the sanctioning of electoral violations follows general administrative processes, which are often lengthy. This creates a gap between expedited complaint review and sanction enforcement, limiting the timely impact and subsequently undermining effective due process.⁸⁸ In addition, the law does not provide for the possibility to challenge election results protocols, and only the election results may be challenged before the Constitutional Court within 15 days of their official announcement by the CEC. Such rights are afforded only to a limited number of institutions, thereby restricting everyone's access to an effective

⁸³ Bulgaria ratified the [Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#) in May 1999.

⁸⁴ The Protection Against Discrimination Act, the Political Parties Act, and the Assembly, Meetings and Manifestations Act establish mechanisms intended to ensure equal treatment and allow citizens to assemble politically.

⁸⁵ See Article 9.1 of the [1995 Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#). See also [the Advisory Committee](#), 2024 Opinion.

⁸⁶ DPS and APS are perceived as representing the interests of the Turkish and Muslim communities and held 29 seats and 14 seats respectively in the outgoing parliament.

⁸⁷ When a complaint or alert does not involve a violation, the CEC issues 'protocol decisions' as part of the session minutes.

⁸⁸ See paragraph II.3.3.g of the [2002 Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#).

legal remedy, in contradiction with OSCE commitments, other international obligations, and prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.⁸⁹

The ODIHR EOM observed a total of 373 complaints, alerts, and appeals, with the majority handled by the DEC (244 cases), followed by the CEC (95 cases) and the SAC (34 cases).⁹⁰ Most concerned the composition and appointment of lower-level commissions, candidate registration, campaign activities, and procedural aspects of the electoral process.⁹¹ A limited number of complaints were upheld or resulted in corrective action. A significant proportion of complaints not examined on the merits pointed to a predominantly formalistic approach, often linked to strict standing requirements and procedural constraints. Gaps and ambiguities in the legal framework on misuse of administrative resources led to a legally unsubstantiated application of the law; although intended to ensure candidate equality, some administrative decisions lacked a clear statutory basis.⁹² In several cases, including appeals related to the determination of polling stations abroad, the SAC upheld CEC decisions, finding them compliant with the legal framework.

The caretaker government regularly provided information on activities aimed at curbing potential electoral violations, which were largely linked to allegations of vote buying and pressure. According to the MoI, a total of 2,066 reports related to alleged electoral violations were registered during the campaign period. Law enforcement authorities initiated 534 pre-trial proceedings, including on vote buying and undue influence on voters.⁹³ In this context, 360 individuals were detained, and 5,380 warnings were issued. Concerns about the independence of the prosecutor's office were raised by several ODIHR EOM interlocutors, given their role in addressing vote buying and intimidation cases. Some interlocutors also noted that uncertainty surrounding the current prosecutor general's mandate could impact the handling of election-related criminal cases, potentially leading to delays in enforcement.⁹⁴ These concerns, coupled with the lengthy procedures in investigating these cases, affected the handling of election-related criminal matters.

Election Observation

The Electoral Code provides for both citizen and international election observation. Registered contestants are also entitled to appoint their agents to follow the electoral process at all levels of the election administration and proxies to observe at polling stations, a right exercised by some parties and coalitions. Applications for observer accreditation must be submitted to the CEC no later than 24 hours prior to election day. There is no requirement for citizen organizations or contestants to train their

⁸⁹ Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that everyone shall have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity. Article 2.3(a) of the [ICCPR](#) states that “any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy...”. The [2002 Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) provides, at its Section 3.3.f, that “All candidates and all voters registered in the constituency concerned must be entitled to appeal”.

⁹⁰ See the [CEC database](#); [DEC databases](#) are available under respective DEC's.

⁹¹ In two cases, this concerned the campaigning: one DEC established a campaign violation for campaigning at state and municipal agencies and institutions committed by the GERB candidate and by the three mayors of the Novi Iskar, Katina, and Lokorsko municipalities. Another DEC also identified a campaign violation by the PP-DB candidate for campaigning at the public property of the pensioners' club in Novi Iskar.

⁹² Decisions [No. 103-NS](#), [4718-NS](#) and [107-NS](#) barred use of a minister's image by invoking good morals and misuse of public resources, although neither clearly covers officials' likeness, effectively creating an extra-statutory restriction.

⁹³ The MoI announced that it seized EUR 1 million during operations against vote buying.

⁹⁴ In December 2023, constitutional amendments reformed judicial governance, restructuring the Supreme Judicial Council and reducing the Prosecutor General's term from seven to five years. These changes were challenged before the Constitutional Court with proceedings ongoing. In January 2025, further amendments to the Judiciary Act introduced rules for appointing an acting Prosecutor General, including a six-month limit. Differing interpretations of how these rules interact created legal uncertainty about the duration and termination of such mandates.

observers on election day procedures. Media representatives were entitled to be present at all stages of the electoral process.

In an inclusive process, the CEC registered 26 civil society organizations comprising 2,760 observers.⁹⁵ No large-scale nationwide citizen election observation was conducted. However, some of the registered observer groups concentrated on the polling stations they deemed to be at risk according to previous observations. In addition, long-term observation was primarily facilitated by the Civil Society Council, which operates as a consultative body to the CEC, providing a continuous platform for dialogue. The ODIHR EOM had access to all stages of the electoral preparations, including the centralized production of the voter lists and ballot papers and paper rolls, and the final stage of the certification process of the EVMs, the trusted build of the source code.

Election Day

Election day was conducted efficiently and peacefully, without significant disruptions. According to CEC preliminary data, voter turnout reached 34.6 per cent at 16:00.⁹⁶ The CEC began posting most of the preliminary election results down to the polling station level, contributing to transparency.⁹⁷

The reprinting of ballot papers in two constituencies did not adversely affect the overall organization of the electoral process, and the voting process proceeded without any ballot shortages. In response to last-minute replacements of polling staff, the CEC acknowledged the issue and called for measures to prevent the replacement of trained polling personnel in future elections.⁹⁸

Opening procedures were observed in 68 polling stations, voting in 624 polling stations, and counting in 60 polling stations, while tabulation was observed in all 31 DECs. Nearly 36 per cent of polling stations observed were located in rural areas. In 88.3 per cent of observations, voters could choose between EVMs and ballot papers. Women were well represented among the PEC members in polling stations observed by the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM); they comprised 68.6 per cent of members and chaired 72.4 per cent of the observed PECs. Party or coalition agents (or their proxies) were present in 26.6 per cent of the polling stations observed, whereas citizen observers were noted in only 8.5 per cent.⁹⁹

Of all polling stations observed, 109 were designated by the CEC as accessible for voters with disabilities. Independent access was ensured in 95 of these stations, and 96 had an adequate internal layout for voters with reduced mobility. Regrettably, among the remaining observed non-designated polling stations, independent access was ensured in 20.8 per cent, while only 61.8 per cent had an adequate internal layout.

Most polling stations opened on time. The opening process was assessed positively in all but 2 of the 68 polling stations observed, highlighting the generally consistent application of procedures.¹⁰⁰ The IEOM observers reported only isolated instances of minor procedural omissions. The IEOM assessed the voting process positively overall, both in terms of the general environment and adherence to

⁹⁵ The [groups](#) with the largest number of observers were the Union of Reserve Officers and Sergeants, Future for Northwest Bulgaria, Youth for the Balkans, with 860, 357, and 579 observers, respectively. These three groups observed at least one national election in the past five years.

⁹⁶ The turnout was announced at 11:00 and at 16:00. However, the posting of the final preliminary turnout, which was due at 23:00, was delayed.

⁹⁷ In addition, a few days before the elections, the CEC published a [searchable online map of polling stations](#) to facilitate voter access to information on where to vote and improve transparency.

⁹⁸ Advisor to the Caretaker Prime Minister on electoral matters also pointed to political parties' responsibility for last-minute replacements of untrained PEC members and called for the reform.

⁹⁹ PB, GERB-SDS, BSP and DPS were the four entities most represented respectively in 25.9, 25.3, 15.5 and 12.6 per cent of the overall polling stations observed.

¹⁰⁰ Of these, 73 stations operated with both EVMs and ballot papers.

procedures in 98 per cent of polling stations observed, describing it as calm and orderly. Voters were largely familiar with the use of the EVM. The most consistently implemented procedures included verifying voters' identification and ensuring that voters signed the voter list. Individuals not belonging to a polling station were appropriately turned away or redirected to another polling station, mostly as they were not on the voter list (5 per cent) or could not present valid identification documents (1 per cent).

A small number of negative assessments were mainly linked to procedural shortcomings. In 15.2 per cent of polling stations visited, the serial numbers on ballot papers were not checked before being cast by the voters. The secrecy of the vote was also compromised in 3.5 per cent of observations, largely due to the layout of polling stations or the handling of ballot papers during the stamping process. In 27 polling stations observed (5 per cent), EVMs malfunctioned and had to be repaired, temporarily hindering the process. The CEC also announced that EVMs in a total of 75 polling stations ceased functioning permanently due to technical problems, resulting in those polling stations switching exclusively to paper ballots.¹⁰¹

Vote counts observed by the IEOM (53 out of 60) were assessed generally positively, and prescribed procedures were followed in most cases. When assessed negatively, this was due to some procedural errors or omissions. These included failures to count signatures (10 observations), to verify the number of ballots found in the ballot box (13 observations), the lack of reconciliation of the figures in the protocols (6 observations), and the failure to post the protocol at the entrance of the polling station (29 observations). However, the protocol was provided to authorized persons in 54 observations when requested. Overall, the process was transparent, and no official complaints were filed. The newly developed e-protocol was widely used, enhancing the accuracy of the process. Live-streaming of the count contributed to the public confidence in the process.

Tabulation was observed in all 31 DECAs (in total 51 observations) and was assessed positively in all but five cases. Discrepancies in the protocols were identified in 17 observations and were resolved in accordance with legal procedures in 14 of these cases. In 13 observations, the premises were overcrowded, but the authorized persons had a clear view of the procedures in 44 cases, and observation was generally unimpeded in 43 cases. DECAs were cooperative in the vast majority of instances (48 observations).

Despite reminders from the CEC of the legal ban, several opinion polls were published, including covert polls in which parties were disguised as cars or food items.¹⁰² In addition, numerous broadcasters and online outlets published candidates' political statements on election day, principally those of Boyko Borisov and Rumen Radev, related to prospective coalitions. The CEC reported receiving a total of 250 complaints and signals, 39 of which were related to breaches of the campaign silence and 90 to election violations, some of which were referred to the respective DECAs for their review. DECAs reported a total of 337 complaints, which primarily concerned technical malfunctions of EVMs, the unauthorized presence of local executive officials as party representatives, and recurring procedural errors, such as the failure of commission members to correctly stamp machine-generated ballots. In addition, the MoI received 328 signals on election day related to vote buying and controlled voting.

***The English version of this report is the only official document.
An unofficial translation is available in Bulgarian.***

¹⁰¹ These stations numbered 36 at 11:00 and 75 at 16:00.

¹⁰² This includes *Kapital.bg*, *Trud.bg*, *Standardnews.com*, *Marica.bg*, *Blitz.bg* and *Pik.bg*.

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sofia, 20 April 2026 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments, Council of Europe standards, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and with national legislation. Both institutions involved in this International Election Observation Mission have endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

Dunja Mijatović is the Head of the ODIHR EOM, deployed from 13 March. The Head of the PACE delegation was Chris Said.

This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation, and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some months after the completion of the electoral process. The PACE will present its report at the June part-session.

The ODIHR EOM includes 15 experts in the capital and 14 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 155 observers from 33 countries were deployed, including 142 observers deployed by ODIHR, as well as a 13-member delegation from the PACE. There were 51 per cent of women among observers. Opening was observed in 68 polling stations, and voting was observed in 598 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 60 polling stations, and the tabulation in all 31 DECs.

The IEOM wishes to thank the authorities of the Republic of Bulgaria for the invitation to observe the elections and the Central Election Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their assistance. The IEOM wishes to also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties, candidates, media, civil society organizations, and the international community representatives for their co-operation.

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