

Belgrade elections 2018



Long term observation Second interim report

summary

February 10 - February 24

CRJA

SUMMARY**BELGRADE ELECTIONS 2018****LONG TERM OBSERVATION SECOND INTERIM REPORT**

Ordinary elections for 110 councillors in the City Assembly of Belgrade shall be held on March 4th 2018. This shall be the first time since the establishment of the multi-party system that the Belgrade elections are held independently and not along with parliamentary, presidential or local elections in the entire country. Although these are the elections for the City Assembly, the invested resources, national media's attention and state and city public officials' engagement resembles to the electoral atmosphere seen at the national level.

Many of election irregularities are hardly a novelty in 2018. Nevertheless, the lack of solutions in the past resulted that this election process is not entirely in line with international democratic standards for free and fair elections.

After a month of "working behind the closed doors" and 18 sessions, the City Election Commission (CEC) started awarding the accreditation to domestic observers for the electoral bodies monitoring. In this period, the work of the electoral administration was marked by the proclamation of the last ten out of 24 proclaimed electoral lists. The decisions made by the CEC in this period were in line with positive legal regulations and by-laws. However, once again, the existing regulations did not ensure the integrity of the election process which was marked by a series of controversies regarding "Belovgrad", "NOPO" and "Enough is enough of robbery, corruption and thievery – Radulović Milorad". This situations indicates deficiencies in electoral legislation in force which is unable to respond to increasing challenges of the election processes (ab)use, as evidenced by the recommendations given by international and domestic observation missions in previous election processes, which have never been implemented. In this period, decisions were passed on regarding the formation of polling committees, publishing of the total number of voters and determining of the appearance and format of the ballot paper.

In this period too, the cases of the public officials campaigning represent the most striking form of public resources abuse. Overstepping the thin line between a party and the power is reflected not only by the public officials' campaign, but also in the methods of communication. It was noted that in a number of cases, the results of public institutions accomplished thanks to tax payers' assets were attributed uniquely to the personal merit of the candidates to the elections or to the political party they represented. The public officials' campaigning was perceived with city and with state officials, too. A significant engagement was observed with all ministers, the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic of Serbia.

A mild increasing trend was observed in cases of abuse of public companies for the purpose of political campaigning in comparison to the previous reporting period. Various cultural and entertaining activities were recorded in the observed period, organised by city municipalities with the disguised aim to

promote a specific electoral list. Inevitably, this type of abuse was carried out by the representatives of lists whose parties are in power at the city and at the state level.

The CRTA election observation mission has filed to the Anti-Corruption Agency 35 charges regarding the public officials campaigning, the public resources abuse and the political subjects' illicit activities. There were four charges filed to different inspections, as well (communal and educational inspection) regarding the political subjects' illicit activities. Until the closing of this report, the Anti-Corruption Agency has not issued a response to any of the filed charges. In previous election process, the Anti-Corruption Agency used to respond to filed charges on average within 30 to 60 days from the day of submission.

Comparing to the pre-campaigning period and to the very beginning of the election campaign, the results of media monitoring show certain differences in this reporting period. Although there is still no equal representation of members of ruling and opposition parties in the media, such disproportion was somewhat reduced by the end of the campaign. Observing the total of features, i.e. articles, the opposition was twice as less represented than the ruling coalition (38% vs. 62% respectively), while this proportion was equivalent to 1:4 before the campaign, i.e. to 1:3 in the first three weeks of the campaign. The tone of features referring to the opposition was mostly neutral, whereas the tone of features concerning the ruling parties remained mainly cheering and biased.

When it comes to the attacks toward certain parties and political actors, the opposition representatives most often verbally attacked current city officials, and one another. The Serbian Progressive Party as a party most often verbally attacking their political opponents, mainly targeted Dragan Đilas, Aleksandar Šapić, Saša Janković, Vuk Jeremić and Dragan Šutanovac.

So far in the campaign, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (the REM) has twice performed monitoring of election videos, both times upon request lodged by the Radio Television of Serbia in order to determine whether their contents were in line with provisions of the Advertising Law. The REM ordered the suspension of the broadcast of the video "the Mayor" of the electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić – Because we love Belgrade!", while the broadcasting of the video "Đilas 1 and 1" was permitted as the REM concluded that its contents were not contrary to the Advertising Law. Although the REM Council held three extraordinary sessions in this period, their minutes have not been made available to the public. The REM has not made available to the public citizens' charges filed during the election campaign, nor potential decisions regarding the initiation of procedures following such charges. One of the most drastic examples of election videos, that the REM and other institutions failed to take into consideration although there were charges filed, needs to be depicted with the utmost care. Namely, it is a video featuring the director of the University Children's Hospital in Tiršova Street, Zoran Radojičić, the first person on the electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić - Because we love Belgrade". By broadcasting of this video, six laws and the Code of Medical Ethics are being infringed.

In the observed period, an increased intensity of the campaign was recorded in terms of communication with citizens. In relation to the beginning of the campaign when only the ruling parties tried out nearly all means of communication with citizens, this time, heightened activity of opposition parties was noted, too.

Cases of massive phone calling of citizens, who had not declared themselves as members of any party and who had not given to any party their data, were recorded only in the case of the electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić – Because we love Belgrade!". This method of communication with the electors

represents one of the most distinctive features of the campaign. These cases attracted particular attention of the public because of a possible abuse of citizens' personal data.

In this period as well, it was observed that the participants to the election process rather opted to pass their messages via negative campaigning than through concrete election programmes. This phenomenon was present both with the ruling parties and of the opposition. Compared to the previous period, it seems that negative campaigning is more intensive, particularly because of the appearance of new, anonymous emitters such as profiles on social networks (Instagram and Facebook) "The Key to the Change", or anonymous authors of the portal "Grand Theft Beograd" (gtbeograd.com) and printed material "Demokratska pljačka Beograda" ("Democratic Theft of Belgrade").

Continuous and equally intensive attacks by different means have been noted towards the list "Let's not drown Belgrade" since the very calling of the elections. In this reporting period, negative campaigning reflected in sticking of fake leaflets of this lists to people's cars by permanent glue or to entrances to residential buildings, as well as in writing of insulting contents at the caricature exhibition by Predrag Koraksić Corax.

The prevention of political campaigns in public spaces and the cases of intimidation were reported. The "Human Wall", i.e. the encirclement of a political opponent during the conduct of their regular campaign activities, was recorded on several occasions and represents an unseen form of pressure on the actors in the election process to this day.

According to the information received by the CARTA election observation mission at the session of the City Election Commission, prisoners who are in detention units in the District Prison in Belgrade, and who have the right to vote in the elections for the City Assembly of Belgrade, shall not be able to exercise this right. The Ministry of Justice informed the Commission that the conditions for holding a vote within the Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions had not been met.

The CARTA Election Observation Mission monitors all occurrences during the election campaign, the very Election Day and the post-election processes and informs the public in a continuing manner. The CARTA is an independent nonpartisan civil society organisation observing the elections in accordance with international standards for election processes observation.