

**Belgrade elections 2018**



**Long term observation  
First interim report**

**summary**

**January 15 - February 10**

**CRJA**

## SUMMARY

### BELGRADE ELECTIONS 2018

#### LONG TERM OBSERVATION FIRST INTERM REPORT

Ordinary elections for 110 councillors in the City Assembly of Belgrade shall be held on March 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Ambiance:** The ambience in our society before the Belgrade elections is not democratic. There is a predominant narrative stigmatising all those who are not like-minded as enemies of the state. There is no pluralism of opinion on national televisions, no responsibility for the spoken or published word, no dialogue whatsoever.

**VOTER'S LIST:** In the period from October 2017 to February 2018, the CRTA gathered information about the number of voters registered in Belgrade's municipalities. Out of 17 city municipalities, five did not submit the information on the number of voters (Voždovac, Zemun, Lazarevac, Rakovica and Sopot). Analysing the trends in the number of voters in other city municipalities, it was found that there were no major oscillations that could point to possible irregularities.

**CITY ELECTION COMMISSION and REGULATORY BODIES:** At the beginning of the field observation of the election campaign, the CRTA election observation mission sent calls for meetings to the City Election Commission (the CEC), the Anti-Corruption Agency (the Agency), the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (the REM) and proclaimed lists. Until the closing of this report, no institution or ruling parties' election headquarters have responded to the CRTA's invitation. A communication between the election observers and all relevant actors is necessary for a comprehensive consideration of the election process.

The work of the electoral administration, as well as of independent institutions that should ensure compliance with electoral rules and procedures, is not fully in line with the standards for free and fair elections. What casts a shadow on the election process is the fact that the work of the City Election Commission remained closed to the public in the first month of campaigning. Neither media nor domestic observers received accreditations for monitoring the work of this body. The "work behind the closed doors" is contrary to provisions of the Rulebook on the Work that establishes the publicity of the work of the CEC. The CEC established on January 17<sup>th</sup> that the associations "the Centre for Free Elections and Democracy – CESID" and "the CRTA" had fulfilled conditions set forth for domestic observers in the election process, but authorisations for monitoring the work of the CEC have not been delivered until the closing of this report. Disabling domestic observers to monitor the work of the election administration infringes the international obligations that Serbia has taken over as a member of the OSCE and seriously violates the transparency of the electoral process. The Belgrade elections shall be

held without the OSCE election observation mission (ODIHR) because this mission does not monitor local elections.

In the on-going campaign, there is an increasing trend of cases of potential abuse of public resources and public officials campaigning by municipal, city and republic officials. On January 29<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Agency informed the public via its website that it started monitoring the election campaign. Since January 15<sup>th</sup>, the CRTA election observation mission has filed to the Anti-Corruption Agency 14 charges regarding the political subjects' illicit activities, public officials campaigning and public resources abuse. Until the closing of this report, the Anti-Corruption Agency has not issued a response to any of the filed charges.

Since the Belgrade elections were called, the REM has come forward to the public, to media services providers and to political subjects only once stating that election campaign is underway and that the electronic media are held to respect regulations regarding the conduct of broadcasters in the election process. The REM has not reacted on account of charges filed by citizens or political subjects although it was noted that citizens had so far filed more than 300 charges against electronic media for cases of media discrimination or untrue and unobjective reporting. The REM's decision in the case of the entertaining show "Žikina šarenica" (Žika's variety show), broadcast on Radio Television of Serbia illustrates how this institution interprets the law and its own function in the protection of equal, timely, truthful, unbiased and complete informing about the election process. The REM permitted the broadcasting of the show "Žikina šarenica", the author and host of which is a candidate of the electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić – Because We Love Belgrade", although according to the REM Rulebook it is strictly forbidden that a candidate appears as a host of a show.

**MEDIA:** The analysis of media reporting in this reporting period shows that there is no uniform representation of the political stakeholders in the media, while the messages and topics remain unchanged in comparison to the pre-election period. Nevertheless, the percentage of "public officials campaigning" cases in the media reports has doubled. The findings indicate that the opposition is almost three times less represented in the media compared to the ruling parties, although there has been an increase in media coverage of their activities resulting from the official campaigning. It is noted that the featuring stories about the ruling parties are predominantly biased, while the reports on the opposition are predominantly neutral. Dragan Đilas is the most represented member of the opposition whereas Siniša Mali and Goran Vesić, remain city authority representatives whose activities were most reflected in the media.

**COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN:** On the basis of reports prepared by the CRTA election observation mission "Citizens on Watch", in the first month of the campaign, an intensive campaigning of the list "Aleksandar Vučić" was recorded in the field, while other lists' activities were of a significantly lower intensity. With regard to communication methods, the election campaign for Belgrade elections is no different from campaigning we recorded in previous election cycles.

As it was noted in campaigns in previous election cycles both at the national and at the state level, this campaign is also dominated by negative campaigning aiming at other political stakeholders recorded with electoral lists of the ruling parties and of the opposition. Topics and messages tackled with citizens remain general in this phase of the campaign, which indicates the lack of clear and concrete programmes. Topics and messages often go beyond local boundaries or are directed to solving of general issues on the city level, whereas the focus on specific topics and problems of city municipalities is found to be narrow. When it comes to the relation between messages sent by the representatives of ruling parties and the opposition, ruling parties promote their own results more often than the opposition, whereas the opposition dominates in election promises, attacks to political opponents and calls for support.

In the first reported period, in the direct communication with voters, it was noted that negative campaigning was most often directed to lists "Ne davimo Beograd" (Let's not drown Belgrade), "Aleksandar Šapić", "Dragan Đilas" and "Aleksandar Vučić". It has so far been recorded that "emitters" of the negative campaign on the field are most often lists "Aleksandar Vučić", "DJB and Dveri", "Dragan Đilas" and "DS, SDS, Nova and ZEP". Negative campaigning and its "emitters" primarily focus either on current and former ruling parties or on those who most actively indicated in the past period the shortcomings and abuse in the work of city and state institutions.

The list "Ne davimo Beograd" (Let's not drown Belgrade) is exposed to the most brutal hate speech and even to threats, physical violence with elements of criminal offense - endangerment of security - referred to in article 138 of the Criminal Code. During the campaign, the members of the Initiative have filed more than 50 charges to the public prosecutor's office on account of endangerment of security and threats that "they should all be put on the stake and swiftly executed", that "a bullet is a waste for their kind... a knife and a wire would suit them just fine".

The largest number of information regarding pressures coerced on voters and vote buying have been associated to ruling parties, i.e. their aim is to provide support to the list "Aleksandar Vučić". As an example of a potential indirect vote buying, we would like to single out cases in Altina in Zemun and in Banijska Street in Zemun, where unconfirmed information have been received regarding the allocation of the humanitarian aid in return to the safe vote. It was also noted that while touring the municipality of Savski venac, the activists of the Serbian Progressive Party in their "door-to-door" campaign promoted and offered to citizens different free programmes organised by the municipality. Furthermore, the observers recorded at the municipality of Novi Beograd that the activists of the Serbian Progressive Party offered to retired persons free medical examinations in the municipal council of the Serbian Progressive Party in Novi Beograd. The observers also recorded distribution of oil and flour to certain voters at the Serbian Progressive Party stands in Novi Beograd. These cases are not rare and the observers throughout Belgrade reported on situations in which an indirect buying of the votes was attempted through a food products packages (oil, sugar, flour), packages with personal and home care products, free medical examinations or offers of free programmes organised by municipalities or the party. There were also unconfirmed information that in certain institutions providing social

assistance and accommodation services to vulnerable groups of citizens there were agitations prompting people to support the list “Aleksandar Vučić”.

In the reported period, one physical assault on the activists of the election headquarters of the list “Dragan Đilas” was also noted on February 4<sup>th</sup>. On the same day, according to the statement issued by the election headquarters of the list “Aleksandar Vučić”, an assault was committed against the activists of the Serbian Progressive Party in Novi Beograd.

The CRTA Election Observation Mission continues to monitor all occurrences during the election campaign, the very Election Day and the post-election processes and envisage informing the public in a timely and continuing manner. The CRTA is an independent nonpartisan civil society organisation observing the elections in accordance with international standards for election processes observation.

Full report in Serbian is available on CRTA website [www.crt.rs](http://www.crt.rs).