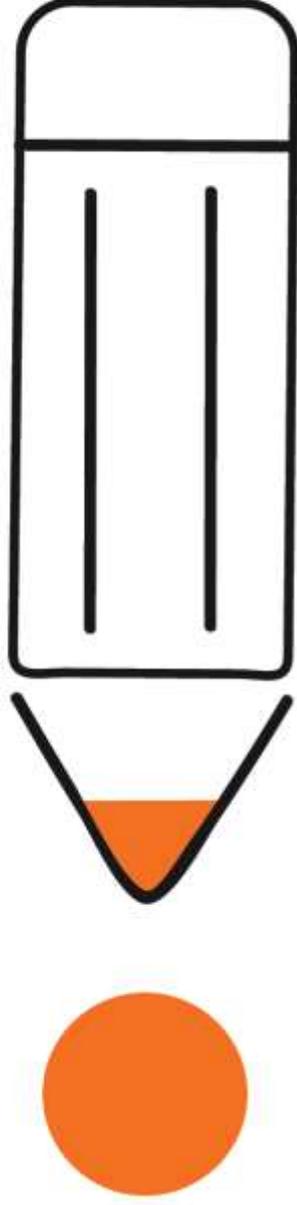


CRTA:



ELECTIONS 2020

CAMPAIGN BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN

Report for the period February 10th - March 3rd 2020



SUMMARY

Serbia enters the period of 2020 parliamentary and local elections in a situation where the political battle continues to be held outside of the institutional framework. Part of the opposition has been boycotting the work of the National Assembly since February 2019. Boycott of the Parliament spilled over to the boycott of elections as well, and was announced by the most influential (according to available public opinion polls) opposition parties and movements, basing their decision on the premise that conditions for free and fair elections are not in place. Half-year long inter-party dialogue, facilitated by the European Parliament and supported with engagement of civil society, has not brought an agreement that would secure the involvement of all actors participating in elections. Elections 2020 will be organized in an atmosphere of weakening democracy, as reported by the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House.

CRTA's election observation mission has started the long-term observation of the pre-election period in accordance with [international standards for an independent election monitoring by citizen organizations](#). Since October 2019, team of monitors has been systematically collecting information about media reporting on all political actors in prime time by media outlets with national coverage. Since February 10, 2020 a total of 120 CRTA's long-term observers have been deployed across Serbia's territory to monitor and report on key segments of the election campaign, including the period before the elections for members of the Parliament were officially called.

Key findings of observation of pre-election developments on the ground and monitoring of media with national coverage by March 3, 2020 inclusive show that political actors have been active in promoting their political options, engaging with voters and gathering support for the upcoming elections. Findings also showed that serious disbalance in media coverage of representatives of the ruling majority, opposition and opposition in boycott has been constantly present.

Observation of the atmosphere ahead of calling the elections showed that political actors have been active across the country, although unevenly. Ruling parties were dominant in communication with voters, although activities of the opposition parties and parties in boycott of parliamentary elections were recorded as well. While the ruling parties mainly relied on promises and glorification of their party successes, opposition primarily focused on promises in dissemination of messages to voters. On the other hand, the main topic of the opposition parties in boycott was the boycott itself, while they also used the negative campaign against the ruling parties and their representatives.

Period before the official calling of the elections was also marked by cases of public officials campaigning, including both the highest officials at the national level and city and municipal authorities, as well as by cases of misuse of public resources. In response to the finding of observers in this period, CRTA filed nine charges to the Anti-corruption Agency, including seven related to cases of misuse of public resources, two on account of the public officials campaigning and three in reaction to identified cases of illicit activities of political actors at education institutions.

In addition, the pre-election atmosphere has been characterized by allegations about pressures on voters, particularly targeting employees in public sector to give support, guarantee the vote or sign the candidate list. CRTA's election observation mission will continue to monitor and assess allegations about pressures on voters and invites the authorized institutions to employ all necessary measures to investigate these cases and sanction identified perpetrators. Within efforts to improve the legislative framework for determining accountability in cases of pressure on employees in public companies, as one of the outcomes of the inter-party dialogue on electoral conditions, CRTA expects from institutions to remain consistent in implementation of laws, work on prevention and effectively sanction proven cases of pressures.

During observation of the period prior to calling of elections, CRTA's observers also recorded several cases of pressure on political actors, including the demolition of party premises by unidentified actors, preventing the conduct of promotional activities in public spaces and cases of intimidation.

Social and humanitarian activities organized by political parties have been identified as one of the key methods employed by the ruling parties to engage with citizens. Although considered as acts of bribing the voters and indirect vote-buying, and not employed with the sole purpose of establishment and operation of political parties, more than 170 cases of distribution of humanitarian aid packages, community actions, medical services, household assistance services and donations to diverse associations and institutions have been recorded by the CRTA's election observation mission.

With regard to pluralism in Serbia's society before the elections were officially called, findings of the five-months long media monitoring, conducted in the period October 14, 2019 – March 3, 2020, point to the fact that all televisions with national coverage dedicate majority of time for reporting about political actors to representatives of the ruling majority. In addition, these media report about the ruling parties mainly in positive or neutral manner, while the tone of reporting about the opposition is mostly neutral and about the opposition in boycott predominantly negative.