

CRTA:

IZBORI : 2023

SECOND INTERIM REPORT OF LONG TERM ELECTION OBSERVATION

November 21st - December 10th

SUMMARY



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The campaign for the extraordinary parliamentary and Belgrade elections took place in an atmosphere of systematic abuse of institutions, public functions and the most influential media, which placed electoral actors in an unequal position. Mass cases of falsification of signatures for candidacy marked the process of the submission of electoral lists. Worrying allegations of pressure on citizens through the public sector, cases of misuse of personal data and the fear of part of the public that the voter list and voting rights are being manipulated call into question the integrity of the institutions of the Serbian state. Formal restrictions on participation in the elections were not recorded, but the campaign took place in a manner in which the border between the state and the party was erased and intolerance towards political opponents was encouraged.

In the penultimate week of the campaign, CRTA sent an appeal to around 1,600 addresses of officials in all city and municipal administrations in Serbia, reminding them of their legal obligations and calling on them to do everything in their power to protect the implementation of the law and the integrity of institutions. The recommendations to the institutions and election actors, which the CRTA Election Observation Mission presented in its previous report, remained unanswered regarding the problems of pressure on voters, suspicions of manipulation of the voter list and voting rights, media inequality and unethical reporting on election candidates.

Half of the announced lists for the extraordinary Belgrade elections are suspected of falsifying signatures of voter support for candidacy. Controversial signatures were the ones certified in municipal administrations. Historically, **this potentially represents the most extensive case of falsification in Serbian elections**, which for now remains without legal consequences, but the prosecution informed the public about the formation of a case. No list suspected of having committed the criminal act of forgery was announced for the extraordinary parliamentary elections.

The Republic Electoral Commission operated in accordance with the law. **Despite substantial increase in transparency of the work of the electoral administrations, important aspects of its work remained inaccessible to electoral actors and the public.** One example concerns data on polling stations for the national elections, where each local electoral commission individually determines polling stations within its territory and submits its decisions to the Republic Electoral Commission in inconsistent formats which are difficult to process. Voter education campaigns remained of limited reach.

A large number of citizens reached out to CRTA after **receiving invitations to vote, addressed to people they claim do not live at their addresses.** The institutions of Serbia, primarily the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, did not take steps to dispel public suspicions of voter list manipulations. There were also no

reactions from the relevant institutions to the allegations made in the public about the migration of voters to Belgrade.

Pressures on voters have intensified, spread throughout the country, and implemented through diverse mechanisms, primarily in the public administration, social and healthcare services, encompassing both employees and beneficiaries. The more intense nature of pressures in the final weeks of the campaign is evidenced by cases of intrusions into privacy, health situations, and places of residence, along with the now common demands on employees and service users in the public sector to vote for a specific party or assist its campaign infrastructure.

Data obtained by CRTA observers also raise suspicions that parties unlawfully possess private data of various groups of citizens and use them strategically for political marketing, pressures, and bribery. Electoral clientelism intensified towards the end of the campaign. Targeted distribution of material gifts to socio-economically vulnerable citizens is one indicator of the misuse of data on citizens' social status. Moreover, this period witnessed testimonies of direct exchanges of material gifts or services for votes.

Since the beginning of the election campaign, the line between the activities of the ruling party and the state has been blurred. According to CRTA observers, **approximately 800 appearances by high-ranking state officials were recorded in the local communities, and their activities have not been registered in only 11% of Serbia's municipalities. A total of 260 events with elements of abuse of public resources** were recorded during the campaign, **quadrupling in the final weeks compared to the first part of the campaign.**

The public space is marked with inflammatory rhetoric and incitement of intolerance, **with several cases of violence, incidents, and attacks on individuals recorded in the final weeks of the campaign.** Throughout the campaign, CRTA has identified **40 incidents with elements of verbal and physical violence.**

As in the first part of the campaign, although he is not a candidate in the elections, the President of Serbia was dominantly present in the public space. On national television, he occupied **almost one-third of prime-time and two-thirds of informative program time.** The President of Serbia was allocated almost **14,500 seconds more** than all opposition representatives combined.

The election campaign ends in a state of even greater media inequality among participants compared to previous elections - the time government representatives received in the most influential media increased by over 10% compared to the 2022 elections. Besides allowing the presence of **government representatives 75% of the time**, national television often portrayed **opposition candidates in a negative tone** in the remaining time. Legal obligations that introduce election blocks during the campaign period, specific regulations for Radio-television Serbia, recommendations for commercial media, and the ban on reporting on the activities of public officials did not allow for balanced and objective information to be given to voters about the electoral offer. While the representation in electoral blocs is almost uniform, informational

programs contribute to the overall imbalance in representation. **In informative programs, the ruling majority occupied over 90% of the time, while the opposition received less than 10%.**

During the campaign, CRTA filed a total of 67 complaints¹ on various irregularities and law violations in the elections.

CRTA submitted 22 complaints to the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), and there has been no response from the REM whether action has been taken². Due to cases of negative campaigning, CRTA also filed five reports to the Supervisory Board of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. **CRTA filed 40 complaints to the Anti-Corruption Agency** due to cases of public office abuse (14)³ and misuse of public resources and unauthorized party activities in the campaign (26).⁴ The Agency has decided on 15 reports so far. In five cases against the Serbian Progressive Party⁵, one against the Socialist Party of Serbia⁶, and one against the Party of Freedom and Justice⁷, the Agency found that the reports were substantiated and violations of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities occurred, resulting in warning measures.

¹ CRTA, CRTA reports, <https://link.crtars.bo>

² Eight against TV Pink, four against TV B92, three against television Prva and three against TV Happy, and one complaint each was filed against local television stations TV Studio B, TV Trstenik and TV Pancevo, while one complaint covered more than 30 local television stations.

³ On the basis of the Law on the Prevention of Corruption, one complaint was filed against the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić; Đorđe Radinović, President of the Municipality of Stara Pazova; Minister of Family Welfare and Demography Darija Kisić; member of the Provisional Authority of the City of Belgrade, Vladimir Obradović; Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure Goran Vesić; Zlatko Marjanović, President of the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Despotovac; the President of the Provisional Authority of the City of Šabac, Aleksandar Pajić; the President of the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Ruma, Aleksandra Čirić; the President of the Provisional Authority of the City of Pirot, Vladan Vasić, the President of the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Bela Palanka, Goran Miljković; Zlatko Marjanović, President of the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Despotovac; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Siniša Mali; the Mayor of the city of Čačak; Damjan Miljanić, President of the municipality of Kula, Milun Todorović.

⁴On the basis of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities, for the misuse of public resources and the implementation of illegal activities, CRTA submitted 22 complaints against the Serbian Progressive Party, two reports against the Socialist Party of Serbia and one report each against the Party of Freedom and Justice and the Serbian People's Party.

⁵The cases brought against the Serbian Progressive Party, in which the Agency issued a warning, are as follows: the first case concerns a report against the SNS for the misuse of municipal infrastructure projects to promote the party on the official Instagram profile of the President of the Provisional Authority in Čačak, as well as for organizing humanitarian activities by distributing packages to families. The second case relates to a report against the SNS for organizing humanitarian activities by the SNS Health Council in Niš. The third case involves a report against the SNS for organizing humanitarian activities, specifically for distributing gifts to socially vulnerable citizens in Bela Palanka. The fourth case involves a report against the SNS for organizing humanitarian activities, namely donating household appliances to a person suffering from multiple sclerosis in Ugrinovci. And the fifth case concerns a report against the SNS for organizing humanitarian activities, specifically for distributing firewood in Veliko Gradište.

⁶The Agency issued a warning to the Socialist Party of Serbia in the following case for organizing humanitarian activities, specifically for distributing chocolates and coffee to citizens by Ana Grozdanović.

⁷The Agency issued a warning to the Freedom and Justice Party in the following case for the use of public resources for the promotion of a political party, as candidate Vladimir Obradović recorded a promotional video in the premises of the Belgrade City Assembly.