

CRTA:

IZBORI 2023

**SECOND INTERIM REPORT
OF LONG TERM
ELECTION OBSERVATION**

November 21st - December 10th



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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 programme 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 programmes contribute to the overall imbalance in representation. **In informative programmes, 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.

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

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 complaints to the Oversight Committee 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 unauthorised party activities in the campaign (26).⁴ The Agency has decided on 15 complaints 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.

2 POLITICAL CONTEXT

Snap parliamentary, provincial and local elections were announced in a climate of political, social and economic tensions that have not recently been recorded in Serbia. The atmosphere of strong feelings caused by the eruption, until then hard to imagine, of violent events that, even for a moment, erased all other social issues from the public discourse and awakened the public to the understanding of the extent to which violence pervades every pore of social reality. Feelings of fear, concern and anger among citizens have increased, as well as doubts that the institutions of the system are ready to fight against the ubiquitous violence.⁸ There was a further deepening of political polarisation,⁹ which culminated in the calling of snap elections.

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 Pančevo, 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 Ćirić; 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.

⁴ On 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.

⁵ The 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.

⁶ The 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.

⁷ The 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.

⁸ Crta, "Attitudes of Serbian citizens on violence - Public opinion survey - September 2023", October 11th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cj>

⁹ Crta, "Protests against violence, Survey of public opinion and attitudes of protest participants - August 2023", August 23rd, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/bp>

At the beginning of the year, as part of the process of normalising relations between Belgrade and Pristina, the authorities in Belgrade demonstrated a slightly more constructive approach to the dialogue. The President of Serbia and the Prime Minister of Kosovo agreed on the text of the agreement¹⁰ the implementation of which would represent full normalisation of relations and *de facto* recognition of Kosovo by Serbia.¹¹ There was an increase in tensions in Serbia, and the regime tried to cover up the essence of the agreement reached, focusing on the issue of establishing the Community of Serb Municipalities and calling for a boycott of local elections in the North of Kosovo, as a result of which Albanians were elected presidents of predominantly Serbian municipalities.¹²

After the mass murders that claimed 19 lives in May, mostly children and young people,¹³ inadequate and inappropriate reactions of the authorities¹⁴ caused a significant political mobilisation of citizens and a wave of protests against systemic violence in society, under the motto “Serbia against violence”.¹⁵ The protests underpinned the authorities’ responsibility for inciting or not preventing violence in society, for media promotion of violence, and the weakened education system, intolerance towards political dissidents, but also for the protection of politically connected persons from criminal prosecution. Changes in the media ecosystem were demanded, including the shutdown of tabloids that continuously violate the code of ethics, changes within the public media service and the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media, as well as the changes of responsible ministers.¹⁶

Protests brought 60,000 people to the streets of Belgrade at one point¹⁷ and they began to spread in cities all over Serbia.¹⁸ In response to the protests, the incumbent Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) organised a rally in support of the “Serbia of Hope” government,¹⁹ which, despite the great party mobilisation,²⁰ engagement of state resources and extensive

¹⁰ RSE, Layen in Belgrade: Implementation of the Ohrid Agreement is *de facto* recognition of Kosovo, RSE, October 31st, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/bq>

¹¹ EEAS, “Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU Proposal - Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia”, February 27th 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/bt>

EEAS, “Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Implementation Annex to the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia”, March 19th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/bv>

¹² BBC, “Local elections in northern Kosovo”, April 24th 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/bw>

¹³ BBC, “School shooting in Belgrade: Footage of the arrest of a suspected student, parents of children in despair”, May 3rd, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/bx>
RTS, “Suspect for mass murder near Mladenovac and Smederevo sentenced to custody for up to 30 days”, May 7th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/c0>

¹⁴ DW, “Serbia: both society and system failed”, May 8th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/c1>

¹⁵ RSE, “Protest ‘Serbia against violence’ in Belgrade and Novi Sad”, May 8th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/c3>

¹⁶ Page “Stands against violence”, Demands of civil protests “Serbia against violence”, <https://link.crta.rs/c4>

¹⁷ Time, “Mass can do anything, when it is determined to get its own”, May 25th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/c5>

¹⁸ The page “Stands against violence”, Map of the “Serbia against violence” protest, <https://link.crta.rs/c6>

¹⁹ Politics, Great People’s Assembly “Serbia of Hope” on May 26th in Belgrade, May 17th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/c8>

²⁰ Crta, “Political pressures on citizens - Story 4: I will not go to the rally on May 26th, even though they are forcing me” <https://link.crta.rs/c9>

logistical support,²¹ failed²², strengthening the impression of the opposition public that changes are possible.

In the same period, difficult economic conditions caused by persistent inflation of as much as 15%,²³ but also the increasingly unfavourable position of the Serbs in the North of Kosovo,²⁴ they shook the support of the dominant party in power.²⁵ Part of the opposition parliamentary parties organisationally supported the protests and transferred the demands to the highest representative and legislative body – the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. A decision was adopted on the establishment of an Inquiry Committee that would investigate the circumstances that had led to the crime, as well as the institutional failures that followed it, but soon the ruling majority denied support for the work of the Inquiry Committee, through a strong negative campaign in the most influential media, referring to the demands of the victims' families. i.e. fearing that the work of the committee would jeopardise the prosecutor's investigation.²⁶

In an attempt to alleviate the politically unfavourable climate, the President of Serbia and the Prime Minister of Serbia announced increases in salaries and pensions, as well as one-time financial benefits for parents and pensioners. They also hinted at the possibility of early parliamentary elections, which could be held, as they said, already in September.²⁷ The government did not fulfil any of the protest demands, which the opposition continued to insist on.

In September, information appeared in certain media about the mobilisation of the SNS party infrastructure in preparation for the elections, and part of the opposition demanded early parliamentary and previously promised Belgrade elections.²⁸ In the media with national coverage, the rhetoric of political polarisation has intensified with the dominance of the anti-Western narrative. Attacks on leaders of opposition parties, representatives of the civil sector and prominent public figures from the field of culture continued,²⁹ and for the first time, "deepfake" technology had been used in order to further discredit the representatives of the opposition under the guise of humorous content.³⁰

²¹ CINS, "At the meeting of SNS with vehicles of state institutions", June st1, 2023, <https://link.crtars/cb>

²² Nova, "We find out: Vučić raged at his colleagues after the debacle at the counter rally", May 27th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/cc>

²³ BBC, "Serbia and inflation: Price growth moderated for the third consecutive month, what summer brings to wallets", June 26th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/cd>

²⁴ DW, "Dozens of people were injured in the clashes between KFOR and Serbs", May 30th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/ce>

²⁵ VOA, "Dissatisfaction of Serbian citizens is growing, what is the government's response?", June 5th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/cg>

Crta, "Protests against violence - Survey of public opinion and attitudes of protest participants - August 2023", August 23rd, 2023, <https://link.crtars/bp>

²⁶ Today, "The Assembly suspended further work of the Inquiry Committee after the request of the parents", July 21st, 2023, <https://link.crtars/ch>

²⁷ Euronews, "September, end of the year or spring 2024: The question of when Serbia will go to the vote is still an equation with more unknowns", June 12th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/ci>

²⁸ RSE, "Part of the opposition submitted a request for early elections in Serbia", September 11th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/ck>

²⁹ RSE, "'It would be foolish to remain silent': Actors in Serbia on criticism from the authorities", June 8th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/cl>

³⁰ VOA, "Ethics or laws - what can prevent the misuse of artificial intelligence", August 17th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/cm>

At the end of September, an armed incident in the North of Kosovo led to the death of a Kosovo policeman and three members of an informal armed group of Serbian nationality. The event significantly worsened Serbia's foreign policy position overnight.³¹

Another proclamation of early parliamentary, provincial and local elections quickly caused a situation in which, with unconvincing explanations, the mayors and presidents of 66 municipalities and cities resigned.³² As these events coincided with the intensification of the campaign for social benefits and salary increases for broad sections of the population,³³ it became clear that elections would soon be called.

In the course of several months of uncertainty about whether, when and which elections would be called, there was also a discussion about the electoral unification of the opposition, which led to the formation of the "Serbia against violence" list.³⁴ Nationalist right-wing parties also negotiated a joint list, but did not reach a consensus on possible post-election cooperation with the pro-European opposition.³⁵

Pre-election tensions were also contributed to by the increase in social dissatisfaction, with proclamations of strikes by educators, postmen, health workers and farmers.³⁶ Although the representatives of the authorities claimed that the elections were called at the request of the opposition, a strong impression remains that the decision was made taking into account, above all, their own interests.

The work of the parliament during 2023 was marked by manipulations and abuses of the rules by the incumbent majority, culminating in the last session before the election, where more than 50 laws were voted,³⁷ thus once again the parliament proved to be a mere tool in the hands of the executive.

Serbia was also left without essential improvements in electoral conditions, especially when it comes to problems such as pressure on voters, abuse of public resources and functions, expansion of clientelistic networks and lack of pluralism in the media.³⁸ International evaluations and indices of democracy still classify Serbia as a non-democratic (hybrid) regime,³⁹ and before the proclamation of the elections, the European Commission reported on

³¹ Weekly, "Ferguson: Events in Banjska represent a real threat to regional stability, September 30th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cn>

³² Direct, "60 mayors resigned", September 28, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cp>

³³ Flash, "Bigger baby bump is coming! Today's payment and social assistance: Two citizens' groups on the list", September 20th 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cq>

³⁴ N1, "Joint appearance of the opposition "Serbia against violence" in the elections: Tepić and Aleksić holders of the republican list", October 27th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cr>

³⁵ Beta, "Jovanović (New DSS): With the pro-European opposition, there is no programmatic government, only a technical one", November 3rd, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cs>

³⁶ N1, "Postal workers continue spontaneous work stoppages across the country", October 25th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/ct>

³⁷ Open Parliament, "Annual report of the Open Parliament on the work of the 13th convocation of the National Assembly in 2022 and 2023", <https://link.crta.rs/cu>

³⁸ Chart, "No progress in meeting OSCE/ODIHR recommendations", October 11th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/cv>

³⁹ Freedom House, "Freedom in The World 2023", <https://link.crta.rs/cy>

V-Dem Institute, "Democracy Report 2023 - Defiance in the Face of Autocratisation", <https://link.crta.rs/d2>

Serbia's minimal progress on the road to the EU accession, explaining in detail the assessment of the lack of progress in the domain of Chapters 23 and 24.⁴⁰

3 THE COURSE OF THE ELECTION PROCESS AND THE WORK OF THE ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

3.1 General assessment of the work of the election administration

The work of the election administration in the second reporting period **took place in accordance with the law and mostly in accordance with the prescribed deadlines.** Transparency in work has increased, the way election administration works has been technically improved, and progress has been made in organising and conducting training for local electoral commissions, as well as for polling station committees. Also, **progress can be observed in the sphere of voter informing, but it seems insufficient, primarily because the information content does not inform voters of the most common examples of violations of the voting procedure and electoral rights at the polling station.** The election administration encountered **numerous allegations of falsification of voter statements on a significant number of electoral lists. No such list was proclaimed in the parliamentary elections, while as many as seven were proclaimed in the Belgrade elections.** The election administration did not have a proper response mechanism to these cases. The actions of the Republic Electoral Commission clearly showed the readiness of this body to deal with the mentioned problem, which we cannot claim with certainty for the City Electoral Commission of the city of Belgrade. In the work of the election administration, the issue of deciding on the allocation of the status of the electoral list of a national minority arose, in connection with which the question of whether the REC discriminated against one of the electoral lists in its work was also opened. The manner of work of the Republic Election Commission and the City Electoral Commission differed. While the REC scheduled sessions within the prescribed deadlines, **the work of the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade also moved within the prescribed deadlines, but was marked by an unusually short time between the scheduling of the sessions and the time of their holding, which made it impossible for the members of that commission to adequately familiarise themselves with the materials for session, and as a result, to have a good discussion about it.**

The CRTA Observation Mission calls on the prosecutor's office to investigate all allegations related to suspicions that certain certifiers forged the signatures of voter support, especially since these might be criminal offences prosecuted ex officio.

3.2 The work of the Republic Election Commission

The essential role of election administration in a democratic society is the organisation and implementation of fair, free and competitive elections. **It seems that the electoral administration in this form has reached its peak, and in order to progress in that role, its reform is needed, that is, changes in the electoral laws in the part related to its**

⁴⁰ EU Delegation in Serbia, "Annual Report on Serbia 2023", <https://link.cрта.rs/d4>

structure and competences. Such changes must move in the direction of strengthening the independence of this body. The progress of the election administration in this field would imply the establishment of a professional and permanent body that would have a significantly wider range of competences. The reformed election administration could achieve such a circle of competence only with the help of its own professional service. Only in such a framework could the electoral administration improve its work and respond to issues such as forgery of signatures, manipulations of the Voters' Register, deciding on the status of national minorities and many other important issues in the electoral process. Finally, such changes to the legal framework would enable the electoral administration to advance and fully take the role it deserves in strengthening democratic processes in our society.

The work of the Republic Election Commission (REC) in this reporting period took place in accordance with the law and the deadlines set for the organisation and implementation of elections. In relation to last year's election process, **the work of the REC has been improved in terms of working methods** (introduction of an electronic system at the sessions), **transparency, conducting trainings⁴¹** for the local election administration, and the implementation of the training plan for instructors and members of polling station committees. Nonetheless, **despite the increased transparency in the work of the Republic Electoral Commission, many aspects of its work remained difficult to access for election actors and the public.** One example concerns the data on polling stations for the Republic elections. As a matter of fact, each local electoral commission individually determines the polling stations in its territory, and submits its decisions to the REC in non-uniform formats that are not suitable for machine processing, which is why it was very difficult for the interested public to find and process such data. Besides, **in the sphere of voter informing, there are noticeable developments, but they seem insufficient**, primarily because the information content does not inform voters of the most common examples of violations of the voting procedure and electoral rights at the polling station. In the previous work, in addition to the actions related to the organisation and implementation of the elections, the importance of deciding on electoral lists stands out. It is, first of all, about the decision on the electoral list of the Russian Party – Slobodan Nikolić, which related to the question of the status of the national minority of that electoral list. Also, the discussion took place when the case of the Russian Party was brought into connection with the manner of decision-making and action of the REC in the case of the Dosta! (Enough!) European path electoral lists, and the question of whether there was discriminatory treatment in the work of the REC is also open. On the other hand, **almost 7,000 statements of voter support for two electoral lists – the Russian Minority Alliance and Enough! European path allegedly certified in the City Administration of the City of Vranje and the Administration of the City Municipality of New Belgrade, which were determined to have never been certified by the certifiers of those two administrations.**

⁴¹ In order to strengthen the capacity of the authorities for the implementation of elections, the Republic Electoral Commission held a total of nine trainings in 17 different dates in this reporting period. Training on the protection of electoral rights, which was intended for presidents, deputy presidents, secretaries and deputy secretaries of local election commissions, was held on December 8 at the headquarters of the Republic Election Commission. Also, trainings for polling committee trainers were held on several dates (November 22, 23, 24, 27 and 28) in the premises of the REC. Other trainings were held in the form of webinars, and the topics were: Control of the records of the work of the electoral committee and determination of the results from the polling stations, the most common errors in the electoral process, the methodology of imparting knowledge to adults, the competence and composition of the authorities for the implementation of elections and the planning and organisation of elections. On December 12, the Portal for Online Training of Electoral Boards started operating on the web presentation of the REC. The training includes nine lessons that familiarize participants with all the procedures related to the work of the electoral commission. A webinar related to monitoring voter turnout is scheduled for December 13.

The largest number of REC decisions in this reporting period were adopted unanimously. The REC unanimously adopted a decision on rejecting the electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance because a person who was not registered in the Voters' Register was proposed as a candidate for MP, on the basis of which the REC concluded that that person does not have the right to vote, and applied Article 77 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament. **Unanimity was not achieved in the issues related to the status of the Russian Party (proclamation, assignment of the status of the electoral list of the national minority), as well as in the issue of appointing a member and deputy member of the REC to the extended composition, at the proposal of the Russian Party.**

The Republic Electoral Commission undertook all actions within the deadlines prescribed by law and adopted all decisions for the implementation of the elections. **In addition to the proclamation of electoral lists, decisions were made on the total number of voters in the Republic of Serbia, which is 6,500,165, the decision on establishing the Collective electoral list, decisions on the form and number of ballots, as well as the content and appearance of the ballot, after which their printing began in the premises of the Official Gazette.**

3.1.1 Deciding on electoral lists

The Republic Electoral Commission **proclaimed a total of 18 electoral lists out of 20 submitted.** Of the 18 declared electoral lists, **seven of them met the conditions for acquiring the status of the national minority electoral list.** All electoral lists were announced unanimously, except for one. It is about the electoral list under ordinal number 16. **Russian Party – Slobodan Nikolić. Seven members of the REC voted against the proclamation of this electoral quoting citing as the main argument the fact that this list should not be given the status of an electoral list of the Russian national minority because this list does not include members of the said national minority.** They also demanded that the opinion of the council of the Russian national minority be sought, and they pointed out that one person on the list is a former member of the Oathkeepers party. They also pointed to the fact that the electoral list cannot be considered the electoral list of a national minority just because it was entered in the register and that the law was circumvented in this way. **The President of the Republic Electoral Commission stated that the ruling of the Administrative Court from 2020 determined the position of the national minority in this electoral list, and that therefore the opinion of the Council of the Russian National Minority was not sought.** He also stated that the holder of the list, Slobodan Nikolić, was entered in the special Voters' Register of the Russian national minority. The members pointed out that in any case the opinion of the Council should have been sought, and that it should have been done in the same way as in the case of the electoral list, **Enough! The European Path was rejected,** which opened the question of whether there was discrimination in this case. The question of whether the electoral list of the Russian Party – Slobodan Nikolić was justifiably declared, considering that the REC deviated from the criteria it applied to the rejected electoral list of Enough! The European path, that is, whether there was discrimination on the basis of political affiliation (Article 25 of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination) or discrimination on some other basis. **The electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance – Pavle Bihali Gavrin, Dr. Christos Alexopoulos is the second list rejected by the REC.**

3.1.2 The case of the electoral list Enough! The European path

Coalition Enough! The European path was founded by parties registered in the Register of Political Parties as parties of a national minority, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the electoral list to be granted the status of a national minority. **In accordance with Article 137 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, the REC requested the opinion of the National Council of the Bunjevac National Minority**, which refused to give consent for this list to be declared as a list of the Bunjevac National Minority. Also, **the REC determined that the candidates of this list, Rade Basta and Nenad Milić, are known to the public as long-time members of the United Serbia, i.e. the Liberal Democratic Party**, and based on all these facts and in accordance with Article 138 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, it decided that the electoral list, Enough! The European Path does not grant the status of the list of national minorities. **Based on the Conclusion of the Republic Electoral Commission on elimination of shortcomings of the electoral list, this list did not supplement a sufficient number of voter statements, and was not even announced.** An objection was filed against this decision, in which the applicant of the electoral list, Mirko Bajić, claims that he suffered a severe form of discrimination in the sense of Article 13 of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination. The submitter of the list claims that the REC did not behave equally towards him and Slobodan Nikolić and that it did not treat the same factual situations of these two electoral lists equally, and believes that on the basis of Article 6 of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination direct discrimination occurred, i.e. that due to personal properties in the same situation put in a disadvantageous position. The objection was rejected because it was not submitted by an authorised person, and for the same reason the appeal to the Administrative Court was rejected, so the factual situation was not established before the Court.

On the other hand, **the Russian Party – Slobodan Nikolić was declared as the electoral list of the national minority without the requested opinion of the National Council of the Russian National Minority. The REC did not take into consideration the fact that the candidate Marko Petrović is on the list, who is known to the public as a former member of the political party Oathkeepers**, while it was subsequently established that some candidates from this list are members of the New Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia. **The ruling of the Administrative Court from 2020, which gave this list the status of a national minority list, was highlighted as the main argument for this kind of action.** In 2020, the Administrative Court found that the REC's decision refusing to establish the status of a national minority for that electoral list was not sufficiently well-reasoned (due to the fact that the legal basis for the refusal was not stated, but only the fact that the members did not vote for the adoption of the proposal), and on the basis of the fact that this list met the formal conditions, annulled the decision of the REC. The status of that list was contested again in the 2022 parliamentary elections. The REC refused to declare this list as a national minority list, referring to its discretionary authority to decide not to grant the status of a national minority list despite all the submitted evidence (in this case the consent of the National Council of the Russian National Minority was also submitted) because it does not consider that this list will represent the interests of the national minority. The Russian party, within the deadline for the amendment, did not submit the missing number of signed voter declarations, and the Administrative Court did not even decide on the status of the list of national minorities, since they did not fulfil the requirements prescribed by law for the declaration of the list.

Based on the presented facts, **it can be concluded that the REC did not make a mistake by issuing a decision refusing to list Enough! The European path grants the status of the electoral list of a national minority, but the question can also be raised whether there has been indirect discrimination**, which in Article 7 of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination exists if an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice puts a person or a group of persons or could put, due to their personal characteristics, in a disadvantageous position compared to other persons in the same or similar situation. **Both lists have candidates who are generally known to be members of another political party, which according to Article 138 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament is a reason for rejecting the proposal to establish that the list has the status of a national minority list. In this case, the RIK should have at least doubted whether the Russian Party will really blunt the interests of the Russian national minority and ask for the opinion of the National Council of the Russian National Minority, as it correctly did for the Enough coalition! The European path.** The REC should have taken all the steps it took in the case of the rejected list, that is, based on the potentially negative opinion of the National Council, it should have refused to determine the status of the national minority list for this electoral list. Then the Administrative Court could decide again on the status of this electoral list, regardless of the outcome of the verdict from 2020. It is clear that a specific factual situation is determined for each dispute and it could not be assumed that the Administrative Court would make the same decision in a potential dispute. For the reasons highlighted, there may be doubts as to whether the electoral list is Enough! The European Path was discriminated against on the basis of Article 7 of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, primarily because the REC did not equally apply Article 138 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament according to these two lists, but it did not consistently apply its previous practice either, and the question can be raised whether in this way the coalition Enough! The European path is put in a disadvantageous position.

3.1.3 Disputed signatures - rejection of two electoral lists

The electoral list Enough! The European path submitted a total of 5,701 signed statements of support to the REC, and pleaded to be declared in the status of the electoral list of a national minority. The largest number of collected declarations of voter support was certified by the city administration of the city of Vranje (2,777 statements were initially determined), so the RIK sent a letter to the City Administration of the city of Vranje and asked to provide it with information on how many voter declarations were certified by the City Administration. **The city administration of the city of Vranje informed the RIK that no notarisation of the statement of a voter who supports the electoral list Enough! The European path, was entered in the books of the City Administration. and that no one approached the city administration for certification of the statements for this list, and therefore no one paid the certification costs.** In accordance with these facts, the REC determined through a repeated check that the number of such statements was actually 2,960, so it excluded all statements that were stated to have been certified by the city administration of the city of Vranje. Based on all necessary checks, the REC determined that a total of 1,991 legally valid statements were submitted with this electoral list. After the REC refused to grant the status of the electoral list of a national minority to this electoral list for the aforementioned reasons, it ordered it to submit at least 8009 missing legally valid certified statements of voters within 48 hours. The electoral list Enough! The European Path submitted a total of 398 statements of voter support, of which 346 were legally valid, making a total of 2,337 legally

valid voter statements in total with 1991. Since the shortcomings for the proclamation of this electoral list were not removed, the REC issued a decision refusing to proclaim the said electoral list.

The electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance – Pavle Bihali Gavrin, Dr. Christos Alexopoulos submitted 5231 statements to the REC, and also aimed to be declared in the status of an electoral list of a national minority. An inspection of the Voters' Register revealed that **more than half of the voter statements were certified by the City Administration of the City of Vranje (2,965), as well as that 1,108 statements were certified by the Administration of the City Municipality of New Belgrade.** In connection with these facts, the REC asked the City Administration of the City of Vranje and the Administration of the City Municipality of New Belgrade to provide information on how many voter declarations were certified by these two administrations. The response of the City Administration of the city of Vranje was identical to when it was discussed about the first list – it was stated that in the books of that City Administration there was not a single notarisation of the voter's statement supporting the electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance, and that no one signed the verification he did not even address that City Administration. Based on these facts, the REC performed an additional check and determined that the number of such statements was 2,647. On the other hand, the Administration of the City Municipality of New Belgrade stated in its response that it certified a total of 335 voter statements, not 1108 as stated in the electoral list documentation. Based on these facts, REC performed an additional check and determined that the number of such statements was 1,341. REC also performed all other necessary checks and finally determined that the number of submitted legally valid statements was 1,319. However, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government submitted to the REC, in the report on the verification of candidates from the electoral list, that one candidate (out of 15) was not entered in the unified Voters' Register. It was established that it is the candidate number 2 on the electoral list – Pavle Bihali Gavrin. Based on that fact, and in accordance with Article 77 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, which stipulates, among other things, that the REC refuses to announce the electoral list if a person who does not have the right to vote is nominated as an MP, the REC issued a decision rejecting the proclamation of the electoral list Russian minority alliance.

At this point, it is necessary to problematise two questions. The first question refers to the criminal offence of falsifying a document from Article 355 of the Criminal Code. The second question concerns the decision of the REC rejecting the proclamation of the electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance, that is, the question should be asked whether the mere fact that a person is not registered in the unified Voters' Register means that that person does not have the right to vote.

If we take as true the statements from the City Administration of the City of Vranje and the Administration of the City Municipality of New Belgrade (and there is no reason to claim the opposite), the question arises as to how, who and in what way verified 2,960 voter statements for the electoral list Enough! The European path and a total of 3,653 voter statements for the electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance. Article 355 of the Criminal Code prescribes that whoever makes a forged document or alters a real document with intent to use such document as real or uses a forged or altered document as real or obtains such document to use, shall be punished with imprisonment of up to three years. If the offence is committed in respect of a public document, among other things, the offender

shall be punished with imprisonment of three months to five years and. We believe that in order to protect the integrity of the election process, but also to prevent such occurrences in the future, it is necessary to examine all the facts of these cases. **It is also necessary for the REC to file criminal charges and inform the public about it.**

The Republic Electoral Commission, in accordance with Article 77 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, issued a decision rejecting the electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance. The reason for the rejection of this electoral list is the fact that the candidate under ordinal number 2. Pavle Bihali Gavrin was not entered in the unified Voters' Register, and that there was an obstacle to the proclamation of the electoral list from the aforementioned Article 77 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament. Therefore, REC, based on the fact that the said person was not registered in the unified Voters' Register, concluded that that person does not even have the right to vote. However, neither in Article 52 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, nor in Article 3 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, is it established that in order to acquire and have the right to vote, it is necessary to be registered in the unified Voters' Register. Moreover, the Constitution prescribes as conditions: majority, business capacity and citizenship, while the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament only elaborates this provision of the Constitution and regulates the condition of business capacity in more detail. Only the Law on the Unified Voters' Register states registration in the Voters' Register as a condition, but for the exercise of the right to vote, not for its acquisition or possession. If we go back to Article 77 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, we will see that it states that the electoral list is rejected if a person who does not have the right to vote, i.e. who has not acquired it or does not have it at all, is nominated as an MP, and it is not stated that the electoral list is rejected if a person who cannot exercise the right to vote, i.e. who is not registered in the unified Voters' Register, is proposed as an MP. In order to have all the relevant facts in mind, it is necessary to point out that Article 4 of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register prescribes that persons who have the right to vote are entered in the Voters' Register. By interpreting this provision, it can be concluded that only persons who have the right to vote are entered in the Voters' Register, but this does not mean that all persons who have the right to vote are entered in the Voters' Register, so there remains the possibility that Pavle Bihali Gavrin was not entered in the Voters' Register by mistake made by competent authorities or that his address has been passivated for a specific reason. The fact that the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government submits data from the Voters' Register to the REC for each voter who signed a statement of support for the electoral list, as well as for each candidate on the electoral list, should also be taken into account. Based on this, we can conclude that the REC, based on past practice, acted correctly and refused to proclaim the electoral list of the Russian Minority Alliance. Nonetheless, it seems that the REC should have additionally determined whether Pavle Bihali Gavrin has the right to vote, because it is also the holder of the electoral list, and not make a decision on rejection by applying Article 77 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament based only on the fact that that candidate was not registered into the Unified Voters' Register. The REC had to carry out additional checks, i.e. to determine whether the said person is of legal age, has business capacity and citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, which are the conditions for acquiring and having the right to vote prescribed by the Constitution and the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament. In this way, there would not be the slightest doubt as to whether the said person really has the right to vote in the Republic of Serbia. Doubts that may arise, especially if you take into account the fact that Pavle Bihali Gavrin participated as a candidate in the previous

elections for MPs held on April 3rd, 2022. The Russian Minority Alliance filed an objection to this decision of the REC, and then an appeal to the Administrative Court, both stated legal remedies were rejected. The doubt can be further increased by the fact that when filing the appeal, the Russian Minority Alliance submitted to the Administrative Court a certificate of the electoral right of the City Administration of the City of Belgrade for Pavle Bihalij Gavrin, but the Administrative Court did not value this certificate, quoting as the reason that such a certificate was not submitted to the REC when submitting the complaint.

3.1.4 Ruling on objections

A total of 23 objections were submitted to the Republic Electoral Commission from the day the election was announced. 17 objections were rejected as unfounded, four were rejected, while only one was adopted. Also, according to one complaint, REC declared itself incompetent and referred it to the competent authority.

The REC adopted the complaint of the group of citizens “We – the voice from the people, prof. Dr. Branimir Nestorović” regarding the decision of the MEC Stara Pazova which rejected the proposal to appoint a member in the expanded composition of that local electoral commission, cancelled this decision and appointed a member in the expanded composition of that commission.

Worthy of mention is Mirko Bajić’s objection, which contested the decision of the REC on the rejection of the proclamation of the electoral list, Enough! The European path due to alleged discrimination. However, this complaint was rejected by the REC as having been submitted by an unauthorised person, and acting on the appeal, the Administrative Court also decided the same.

3.1.5 Decision-making by the Administrative Court

A total of seven appeals have been submitted to the Administrative Court since the calling of the election. The Administrative Court rejected four appeals, while dismissing three. The Administrative Court agreed with the REC’s point of view in six out of seven cases, while in one case when the REC rejected the complaint as unfounded, it made a decision to reject the appeal as untimely filed.

3.3 Work of the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade

The work of the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade (CEC) generally took place in accordance with the law and mostly in accordance with the legal deadlines. Nonetheless, in this election process, the CEC encountered situations in which there was a suspicion that various abuses or criminal acts were committed in connection with the forgery of voter’s supporting signatures, and to which it did not have a prescribed reaction mechanism, which once again indicates the need to change the organisation and powers election commissions. Also, the sessions where decisions were made on individual electoral lists were scheduled in a short period of time, which caused a quick reaction from some members of the electoral commission and objections to the work of the commission, primarily due to the fact that when deciding on electoral lists, it was not possible to review all the material in order to determine the existence of potential abuses in the statements of voters who supported a certain electoral list.

The City Electoral Commission undertook all actions within the deadlines prescribed by law and adopted all decisions for the conduct of elections. **In addition to the proclamation of the electoral lists, decisions were made on the total number of voters for the area of the city of Belgrade, which is 1,613,190, the decision on establishing the collective electoral list, decisions on the form and number of ballots, as well as the content and appearance of the ballot, after which on December 7th, their printing began in the premises of the Official Gazette.**

3.3.1 Proclamation of electoral lists and perceived shortcomings

The total number of proclaimed electoral lists in the Belgrade elections is 14, half of which are electoral lists that have caused controversy in the public and doubts about the validity of the statements of voters who supported those electoral lists.

Namely, for seven electoral lists, some members of the City Electoral Commission claimed that some of the statements of voters supporting these electoral lists were falsified. **By reviewing the material, some of the members recognised the persons in the voter support list and after contacting those persons, they came to the above knowledge.** The question was asked and solutions were sought on how to react in such situations. The CEC's position is that when deciding on the proclamation of an electoral list, all elements as well as the content of materials and forms prescribed by law are determined, which especially refers to voter statements and that, if all the conditions for proclamation provided by law are met, the election commission makes a decision on the proclamation of the electoral list. Also, the election commission cannot enter into the verification of the authenticity of signatures, especially since the certification of those statements is the responsibility of authorised certifiers (municipal administrations and public notaries). It was also underpinned that suspicions of forgery of signatures are determined in the proceedings of other state bodies and competent prosecutor's offices, and that this issue cannot be considered and determined in the election process.

As stated in the first interim report, **discussions among the CEC members followed during the consideration of the list of the Russian Party – Slobodan Nikolić, both regarding the credibility of voter's supporting signatures, and regarding the determination of the position of the party of the national minority.** During the discussion, the CEC member stated that she personally contacted a voter who allegedly signed a statement of support for the Russian party and that this person denies that he signed a voter's supporting signatures for the said electoral list. For this reason, some members of the CEC asked for additional insight into voter's supporting signatures and delay in deciding on the electoral list. On the other hand, the president of the CEC informed all members that according to the report of the expert service, it was established that 2,060 voter's supporting signatures are legally valid, i.e. certified by the valid signature of authorised certifiers, and that the CEC has no way to additionally establish the validity of the collected signatures. Although the electoral list was declared by the majority of the members of the CEC of Belgrade (9 votes "for", 6 votes "against"), and then the status of the electoral list of the national minority was determined, some members of the CEC announced that they will use the available legal means to challenge these decisions. An objection was filed to the decision on the proclamation of this

list, both for the reasons of the credibility of the signatures supporting this list, and for the determination of the position of the electoral list of the national minority. The City Electoral Commission rejected that complaint since it was not submitted in time, that is, it was submitted after the 48-hour deadline, according to the CEC's interpretation.

The coalition "Enough! The European path – Zoran Ilić, the new mayor of Belgrade" consisting of the Alliance of Bunjevac from Bačka and the Bunjevac Party of Serbia was ordered to submit the missing number of signatures, but in addition to this, doubts arose about the validity of three signatures of voter's support for this list. Certain members of the CEC stated that they had knowledge that some voters did not sign their support for this list and that for these reasons they filed criminal charges against the notary who verified these signatures for abuse of authority and for falsifying an official document, as well as criminal charges against NN persons for unauthorised data collection and processing. The CEC refused to grant the status of the national minority to this list with the explanation that it does not meet the conditions to be recognised as a list of the national minority, which was supported by the opinion of the National Council of the National Minority of Bunjevac, and that due to the insufficient number of signatures (3000 for the lists which are not national minorities) has not been proclaimed.

When it comes to the electoral list "For the army to return to Kosovo" – Miša Vacić, according to the members of the CEC, it was established that among the signatories of support for this list there were voters who did not support this list, and they requested that the signatures be checked. Despite those requests, this list was proclaimed.

Certain members of the CEC pointed out that for the electoral list "Saša Radulović (Enough is enough – DJB) - Duško Vujošević, Boris Tadić (Social Democratic Party – SDS) – Ana Pejić (Stolen babies) – Good morning, Belgrade", there are at least two of citizens who did not certify the signatures of support for this list, including famous people, and that they also submitted criminal charges to the competent prosecutor's office on this occasion. Given that this electoral list submitted a sufficient number of signatures, a decision was made on the proclamation. 11 members voted for the proclamation of this list, while 9 members were against and 1 abstained.

The CEC members pointed out that in the documentation of the electoral list "Čedomir Jovanović – It must be different" there are signatures of five voters who claim that they did not support this list.

When it comes to the electoral list "Usama Zukorlić – Change is victory – Party of Justice and Reconciliation", some members of the CEC also stated that there are voters who did not sign their support for this list. These are statements of support from two voters, and they also pointed out that they should examine the validity of other signatures that were certified by the same certifier.

The same doubts about the credibility and legal validity of the signatures of support were expressed in the case of the electoral list "Serbia in the West – Zoran Vuletić – Nemanja Milošević – Let's ask professionals".

The CEC members who made claims about forged signatures also pointed out that they did not have enough time to review the material in order to determine if there were any other

suspicious statements by voters and circumvention of the law. Also, they believed that additional information about the performed certifications should be requested from the authorised certifiers, who certified such statements, in order to check whether the voter's statements were certified by them, and following the example of the Republic Electoral Commission, which requested the City Administration of the city Vranje and the Administration of the City Municipality of New Belgrade, information on whether they have certified statements of voters in support of specific electoral lists.

The competent prosecutor's office opened a case regarding these allegations.

3.3.2 Deciding on minority lists

When deciding on determining the position of the electoral lists of national minorities, there was a discussion in which a large number of members considered that the practice according to which the list is announced first, and then the position of the national minority is determined, is not logical. They pointed out that the illogicality exists because the conditions for acquiring the status of the list of national minorities are determined only after the proclamation of the electoral list. Especially if you take into account the fact that the electoral list of a national minority requires twice as many signatures. One of the proposals was to decide first on the request to determine the position of the national minority list and then decide on the proclamation of the electoral list.

Requests for determining the status of national minority electoral lists were submitted by three electoral lists. When deciding on the electoral list "Enough! The European path – Zoran Ilić is the new mayor of Belgrade" The City Electoral commission asked the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights to check the entries in the special Voters' Register and requested the opinion of the National Council of the Bunjevac national minority, while such an opinion was not requested for the other two lists. After the competent ministry determined through a check that none of the candidates from this list was entered in the special Voters' Register of the Bunjevac national minority and after the National Council of the Bunjevac national minority made a decision not to give consent for this electoral list to have the status of an electoral list of the Bunjevac national minority, this list was not declared because it did not submit a sufficient number of signatures of support required to be declared.

3.3.3 Deciding on objections to declared electoral lists

In the reporting period, the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade decided on 14 objections related to the proclamation of certain electoral lists. Two objections were dismissed due to untimely filing, while others were rejected. Among the submitted objections, objections from persons whose data were found on certified statements of support for certain lists, and who requested that the CEC cancel the declaration decisions, considering that those persons did not support the said lists, are distinguished. The CEC rejected those objections, stating that in the process of considering the fulfilment of the requirements for the proclamation of electoral lists, it was established that all the legal prerequisites for their proclamation were met.

3.3.4 Application of the deadline for submitting objections

In the previous reporting period, the City Electoral Commission rejected the objection of the Coalition “Serbia against violence” against the decision on the proclamation of the electoral list of the Russian Party – Slobodan Nikolić. The City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade rejected this complaint as untimely submitted with 10 votes “for” and 8 “against”. Namely, the president of the commission believed that in this situation the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament should be applied accordingly, and Article 79 of that law was applied. According to that article, the deadline for submitting objections is 48 hours from the publication of the decision on the web presentation of the Republic Electoral Commission and it expired on November 17th at 9:21 p.m. The objection was submitted on November 18th at 4:17 p.m. However, in the discussion that followed, the members of the CEC, who later voted against such a decision, pointed out that in this particular case, the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament cannot be applied accordingly, pointing to Article 8 of the Law on Local Elections, which states that the provisions of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament are applied only in issues that are not specifically regulated by this law. They believed that Article 82 of the Law on Local Elections must be applied, which determines the general deadline for filing objections in local elections, namely 72 hours from the proclamation of the decision. Referring to this article, they pointed out that the deadline has not expired and that the objection is timely, and that it cannot be rejected for the stated reason. It was specifically requested that the representatives of the Russian Party in the extended composition be excluded from the decision on the given objection so that they would not decide on their own matter, which the president of the commission refused to do.

The coalition “Serbia against violence” submitted an appeal to the High Court, which accepted the position of the City Electoral Commission and rejected the appeal as unfounded. As the main arguments for which the deadline from Article 79 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament should have been applied, the High Court pointed out that the proper and consistent application of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament according to Article 8 paragraph 1 of the Law on Local Elections, then the principle that the general deadline is applied only in the absence of a special deadline, and a special deadline is regulated by Law on the Election of Members of Parliament (it is general in the Law on Local Elections), and finally the fact that the application of Article 80 of the Law on Local Elections would significantly narrow the circle of persons who can file a complaint. Namely, Article 80 of the Law on Local Elections stipulates that the right to object is limited only to the applicant of the list, while Article 79 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament defines a much wider circle of persons – a candidate, a person whose name is contained in the name of the list or the applicant of the list, the applicant of the list, a political party or a voter. It also stated that the corresponding application is correct due to the fact that in the chapter “Course of the electoral procedure” in part number 2 “Submission of the electoral list” the Law on Local Elections does not specifically regulate the issue of submitting an objection to the decision on the proclamation of the electoral list, while the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament in the same chapter and in the part under the same with the name it does so.

3.3.5 Scheduling of sessions and practice in the work of the CEC Belgrade

The work of the City Electoral Commission was followed by an unusually short period of time between the scheduling of sessions and the time of their holding, as well as short deadlines between the submission of certain lists and the decision on them, as some members of the CEC constantly pointed out. These short deadlines created quite a bit of tension among the members, especially in cases where there were doubts about the authenticity of the voter's signatures and statements. For this reason, the CEC members did not have enough time to familiarise themselves adequately with the materials, and consequently were not able to discuss the proposed agenda items in a quality manner. Sessions were generally held within a minimal period of time from their scheduling, i.e. three hours after the scheduling. In one case, the session was scheduled 30 minutes before its holding, while the material for the session was delivered 15 minutes before its holding. The justification for this kind of action and the urgent convening of the sessions was not clear, nor were the necessary justifications and explanations provided.

3.4 Relocation of voters and the right to local self-government

Increasingly loud allegations in the public about “relocation” or, rather, registering the residence of voters from the interior of Serbia, but also from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Belgrade, without them actually moving to the addresses where they registered their new residence, opened the question of the impact of such (alleged) practice on the democracy of the election process in the capital. The question arises whether such a practice is first of all legal, but also whether it is legitimate and in accordance with the basic principles of electoral right.

One of the modern features of electoral law is the equality of electoral rights.⁴² This is guaranteed by the Constitution in Article 52, as well as the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament in Article 5, as well as the Law on Local Elections, also in Article 5. **Equality of electoral rights implies that one voter has one vote, and also the need to take into account the equality of representation when forming electoral units.** One of the most famous cases of violation of the equality of electoral rights is the so-called gerrymandering, which has become synonymous with electoral manipulation. It is, first of all, the tendentious drawing of borders between electoral units with the aim of disrupting the equality of elections. It seems that this phenomenon has nothing to do with the parliamentary elections in Serbia, since Serbia is a single electoral unit, and there is no possibility for such manipulations. We have the same situation in local elections, bearing in mind that Article 5 of the Law on Local Elections stipulates that councillors are elected in the local self-government unit as one electoral unit. However, gerrymandering also implies the grouping of the so-called safe voters in a larger number of small constituencies in order to achieve the advantage of the ruling party or coalition in relation to other participants in the elections. **This fact becomes more important if we take into account the fact that on December 17th local elections are also held, but not in all local self-government units, only in 65 of them (out of 174).** If the allegations are true, one could imagine a situation in which the parties of the ruling majority “transfer” their safe voters from local self-government units where elections are not held to the City of Belgrade, thus gaining an advantage over other participants in the election race in the

⁴² Equality of choice includes equality of suffrage and equality of representation.

capital. Therefore, although Serbia is not formally divided into constituencies, the fact that local elections are not held in all local self-government units created the possibility of a grouping of safe voters of the ruling coalition in the City of Belgrade (one constituency). If the allegations were true, it would mean that a new type of election manipulation has been created.

From the point of view of the legality of this phenomenon, it should be pointed out that Article 39 of the Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to move and live freely in the Republic of Serbia, while Article 2 of the Law on Temporary and Permanent Residence Citizens establishes that all citizens of the Republic of Serbia have the right of residence if they live permanently on its territory. Therefore, every citizen of the Republic of Serbia has the right to settle in any part of its territory and to register his residence there. However, the Law on Temporary and Permanent Residence Citizens in Article 3 defines permanent residence as a place where a citizen has settled with the aim of living there permanently, i.e. a place where the centre of his life, economic, social, professional and other ties is located, which prove his permanent connection with that place. Therefore, citizens who register residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade have the right to do so only if their goal is to live in Belgrade permanently, i.e. if the centre of their life, economic, social, professional and other ties is in Belgrade, which proves their permanent connection with this city. Otherwise, such registering would not be legal, i.e. it would be a matter of circumventing the law. Also, this would imply a violation of the rights of other citizens residing in the capital, and above all the right to local self-government.

Article 176 of the Constitution stipulates that citizens have the right to local self-government, which they exercise directly or through their freely elected representatives. The Law on Local Self-Government stipulates in Article 2 that local self-government is the right of citizens to directly and through freely elected representatives manage public affairs of direct, common and general interest to the local population. The same Law stipulates in Article 3 that local self-government is exercised in the municipality, town and city of Belgrade. **Therefore, citizens exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to local self-government directly or through freely elected representatives in the local self-government unit where they reside.** Citizens who reside in the territory of the city of Belgrade have the right to manage public affairs of immediate, common and general interest to the local population and can do so directly (citizen's initiative, citizens' assembly or referendum) or through representatives they choose in elections, based on the fact that they enjoy the right to vote in the City of Belgrade.

Article 3 of the Law on Local Elections stipulates that the right to vote in local elections belongs to an adult citizen of the Republic of Serbia over whom parental rights have not been extended, i.e. who is not completely deprived of business capacity and who resides in the territory of the local self-government unit in which he exercises the right to vote. Therefore, residence on the territory of the local self-government unit is prescribed as a special and additional condition for enjoying the right to vote in local elections. In accordance with that, voters who change their place of residence and register it in the territory of the city of Belgrade acquire the right to vote in this local self-government unit, that is, the right to local self-government that they can exercise in that city. If these citizens settled in Belgrade with the intention of living there permanently, that is, if the centre of their life, professional, economic, social and other ties that prove their permanent connection with Belgrade is located in that city, it would be both natural and logical that and they decide who will rule the city. However,

if the above-mentioned statements are correct and those citizens only register their residence (have a formal residence) in Belgrade without fulfilling the conditions from Article 3 of the Law on Temporary and Permanent Residence Citizens, this opens the question of their participation in elections in which they have the opportunity to “shape the destiny” of citizens who formally and essentially have a residence in the capital. More precisely, the question arises whether in this way the right to local self-government of those citizens who actually reside in Belgrade is threatened. It seems that in this way citizens of the Republic of Serbia who are *de facto* not local residents acquire the right to manage affairs of immediate, common and general interest for the local population in the City of Belgrade. In this way, they threaten the right to local self-government of the citizens of Belgrade by directly or through freely elected representatives (in elections) influencing the management of affairs that are of direct, common and general interest to the citizens of Belgrade, and which do not fundamentally concern them.

The “relocation” of voters threatens the democracy and integrity of the electoral process in Belgrade. Such a practice, if the allegations are true, is neither legal nor legitimate, it violates the equality of elections in the capital city and essentially encroaches on the constitutionally and legally guaranteed right to local self-government of every citizen of the city of Belgrade.

During this election process, CRTA addressed several times direct letters or publicly to competent institutions, **the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, asking them to make data available.**⁴³ which

⁴³ On October 6, 2023, CRTA asked the Ministry of the Interior for data on 1) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), regardless of whether their previous residence was in the territory of the city of Belgrade, in the territory of another local self-government unit in Serbia or abroad; 2) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered their residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was also in the territory of the city of Belgrade; 3) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered their residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was in the territory of another local self-government unit in Serbia; 4) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was abroad; 5) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade was deregistered in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and who registered their new residence at a different address in the territory of the city of Belgrade (on the territory of the same city municipality where they had their previous residence or on the territory of another city municipality); 6) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade was deregistered in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and who registered their new residence in another local self-government unit in Serbia; 7) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who deregistered their residence from the territory of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), due to moving abroad. 8) The total number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence was deregistered from the territory of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), due to death. 9) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered their residence in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was in the territory of the same city municipalities (data is required for each city municipality individually); 10) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered their residence in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was in the territory of another city the municipality of the city of Belgrade, not the one in which they register their new place of residence (data is required for each city municipality individually); 11) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered their residence in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, outside the territory of the city of Belgrade (data is required for each city municipality individually); 12) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who registered their residence in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose previous residence was abroad (data is required for each city municipality individually); 13) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence was registered in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose new residence was registered in the territory of another city the municipality of the city of Belgrade, not the one in which they register their new place of residence (data is required for each city municipality individually); 14) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence was registered in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February

would dispel suspicions of manipulations of the Voters' Register and voting rights. Nevertheless, the data that would enable the necessary analysis of changes in residence in Belgrade were not published, nor did they reach CRTA's address in complete form.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the fear of a part of the public in Belgrade is growing due to notifications to vote that in the last weeks of the campaign arrive at home addresses with names that are unknown to the residents of those addresses. **During this period, CRTA received numerous calls from concerned citizens seeking legal interpretation and support regarding suspicions that unknown tenants were registered at their addresses with the aim of participating in local elections in an illegitimate manner.**

11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose new residence was registered in the territory of the same city the municipality where they had their previous place of residence; 15) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence was registered in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), and whose new residence was registered in the territory of another local self-government units in Serbia, outside the territory of the city of Belgrade (data is required for each city municipality individually); 16) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who deregistered their residence from the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), due to emigration abroad (data is required for each city municipality individually); 17) The number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia whose residence is in the territory of each of the city municipalities of the city of Belgrade in the period February 11th, 2022 - October 6th, 2023 (and for each month individually), were deregistered due to death (data is required for each city municipality individually).

⁴⁴ The Ministry informed CRT that it is unable to provide information on the number of adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia who have registered residence in the territory of the city of Belgrade, and whose previous residence was abroad. After checking the remaining data submitted by the MUP to Crta, the Crta team determined that the data contained material errors, which made further analysis impossible. On the other hand, the data published by the MUP publicly on its website in November 2023 contains aggregated adults and minors and thus makes any analysis impossible.

4 COURSE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

4.1. The course of the campaign on the ground

In the period from November 1st to December 10th, more than 4,500 observer reports were received on the activities of both political parties and public authorities. As part of the observation, around 3,000 activities of political parties were recorded.

This election campaign is marked by the dominance of the ruling party on the ground. Although in the first part of the campaign, the activities of the opposition were insignificant compared to the activities of the Serbian Progressive Party, in the last weeks of the campaign, the intense presence of opposition parties on the ground, especially the “Serbia Against Violence” list, can be observed. In the focus of almost all actors are issues of economic standards, infrastructure and social policy. One of the main topics is the issue of Kosovo, which especially marked the second part of the election campaign of the ruling coalition and the parties of the right-wing bloc.

The recorded activities of the list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop” represent more than half (58%) of the total number of recorded activities of all political parties. Promotion at stands, organising public events (conversations with citizens and meetings), door-to-door campaigns and humanitarian activities were recorded as the most frequent activity of the ruling list.⁴⁵ Several rallies were held in different cities of Serbia, the most promoted of which was the rally held in Belgrade on December 2nd. The activities of the ruling party are especially intensified in the municipalities where local elections will be held.

Part of the activity is aimed at **the socially disadvantaged and citizens with disabilities**⁴⁶, and free medical examinations were recorded⁴⁷ and free legal advice organised by this party for its sympathisers and citizens. The party directed part of its activities to the youngest (children’s performances). In addition to the socially vulnerable, special target groups of the SNS include **women, pensioners, young people, as well as minorities and refugees and displaced persons**. The thematic focus of this party’s activities are economic and economic growth, social policy, health, education, but also the issue of Kosovo.

This year, too, the Serbian Progressive Party continued the tradition of publishing a list of the support of celebrities before the elections. As a reminder, in 2017, this party organised “Appeal 650”, and in 2018 and 2020. “Appeal thousand plus”. This year, however, the emphasis was placed on the 2,000 signatories supporting the “Serbia must not stop” list. As the appearance of the first support list can be linked to the “Appeal 100” initiative that preceded it⁴⁸, so in these elections the appeal can be interpreted as a response to the activities of the citizen initiative

⁴⁵ In addition to the regular forms of promotion of the ruling party, frequent party events were recorded in which the entertainment aspect is in the foreground: celebrations and get-togethers for members and sympathisers, folk festivities accompanied by music and a rich meal. And these forms of party promotion are magnified by the presence of public officials. The list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop” has also opened its website, where the successes and results of the SNS led by Aleksandar Vučić are predominantly promoted.

⁴⁶ Instagram SNS Voždovac, Beograd, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fl>
Instagram, SNS Belgrade, November 20th, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fm>
Instagram, SNS Borča, Belgrade, November 24th, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/fn>
Facebook SNS Kula, December 6th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fo>
Facebook SNS Plandište, December 7th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fp>

⁴⁷ Facebook, SNS MO Kragujevac, November 21st 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fq>

⁴⁸ Today, “Entering into an uncertain future, with an uncertain character. They make Serbia a Srbistan”: Danas interlocutors on Vučić’s list of support”, December 8th, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fk>

“ProGlas”, which gathers a large number of prominent personalities and which has been signed by almost 180 thousand citizens so far. The pro-government media labelled the “ProGlas” initiative as anti-regime, while government representatives were especially vocal in this assessment. Moreover, as in previous election cycles, the publication of the list of support for the Serbian Progressive Party was followed by allegations that it contained names of persons who in fact did not want to give support and be on that list.⁴⁹

On the ground, in the second half of the campaign, a significantly greater presence of the opposition was recorded, especially the electoral list “Serbia against violence”, which is the second most active after the list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”. It is noted that **in the second half of the campaign, the electoral list “Serbia against violence” intensified its activities related to direct communication with citizens** (stands, street promotions, tribunes, rallies, as well as the door-to-door campaign). In the thematic focus of the campaign, this list includes, in addition to the topic of violence, the economy and a better standard of living, infrastructure, social policy, ecology, health, the judiciary, but also the topic of election conditions.

Since the beginning of the election campaign, **the activities of the Socialist Party of Serbia have been visible** on the ground, and have been promoted through street actions, forums and conversations with citizens. This party also organised activities related to the provision of free medical assistance, as well as legal advice⁵⁰. In order to win over voters, this party also resorted to a not so common form of promotion, such as free hairdressing services. It is noted that **state officials are present** at the political gatherings of the electoral list “Ivica Dačić – Prime Minister of Serbia”⁵¹ (directors of public companies and public institutions, but also ministers), who are represented both as public and party officials. This is especially the case with events organised by **United Serbia**⁵². As in the activities of the ruling party, the target group of the “Ivica Dačić – Prime Minister of Serbia” list is **the elderly and female population**⁵³, while **health care, social policy, infrastructure and a better standard of living** are among the topics. The leader of this party, Ivica Dačić, in his speeches during the campaign introduces Slobodan Milošević into the narrative as an exemplary leader, but the topic of Kosovo and providing support to Russia is also in the focus of this party’s campaign.⁵⁴

In the thematic focus of the campaign of the **“National Gathering”** list (Dveri and Oathkeepers) is the issue of Kosovo, but also the topics of infrastructure, economy, social policy and election conditions. Most of the activities (stands) of this list were recorded in Belgrade, while this list is less visible on the ground in the interior. Its activities are mainly limited to proclamations in the media, promotion through posters and billboards and a few political gatherings and meetings for sympathisers and members.

⁴⁹ N1, “I only signed ProGlas”: The theater director was on the list of those who support SNS”, December 9th, 2023.

<https://link.crt.a.rs/fr>

⁵⁰ Instagram, SPS Voždovac, Beograd, November 22nd 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/fs>

⁵¹ You Tube, Kopernikus RTV Jagodina, “The coalition “Socialist Party of Serbia - United Serbia - Greens of Serbia” held forums on the occasion of the upcoming parliamentary elections in the Jagodina villages of Dobra Voda and Dražmirovac”, November 21st, 2023.

<https://link.crt.a.rs/ft>

⁵² You Tube, Kopernikus RTV Jagodina, “The Coalition “Socialist Party of Serbia - United Serbia - Greens of Serbia” held a pre-election rally for the citizens of the Center Local Community in Jagodina”, November 23rd, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/fu>

⁵³ Facebook, SPS Sombor, November 23rd 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/fv>

⁵⁴ X (Twitter) SPS, Dušan Bajatović, December 3rd 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/fw>

On the electoral lists for local elections in many municipalities, the coalitions that exist at the republic level are not reflected at the local level. Many of the parties participate in local elections independently or in a coalition with parties that are not part of their republican coalition. This led to the fact that in almost 70% of municipalities the SPS is running independently in local elections, that some unexpected combinations were found on some lists – for example DS and POKS in Krupanj, as well as that in the municipality of Babušnica there are two lists that in they have the name Against Violence. In four municipalities (Doljevac, Lapovo, Rača and Žabari), only the lists of parties that are in power at the republican level, and no one else, go to the elections. The process of announcing electoral lists for local elections was accompanied by complaints, mostly from opposition parties, expressing suspicion of the ruling coalition's attempt to obstruct the electoral process and prevent the opposition from participating in local elections.⁵⁵ In this election cycle too, the participation of a certain number of groups of citizens whose lists actually include local government officials is recorded⁵⁶, but also the participation of minority lists in municipalities where there are almost no members of given minority communities⁵⁷, which **leaves room for suspicion of manipulation and abuse of democratic processes and the position of minorities**, which were also recorded in previous election cycles.⁵⁸

In contrast to the previous election cycle, when the results of several rating surveys were made public just before the election, this year since the beginning of the election campaign, the results of the candidate rating survey have not been publicly announced, nor has it been noticed that political parties, for the purpose of promotion, call for such research.

4.1.1 Gazette of elections - active government

Stimulation of voters also takes place through increased activities of the state, which is indicated by the large number of visits by state officials to local communities. During the election campaign, about 800 appearances of high state officials in local communities were recorded. Only 11% of municipalities and cities did not have a visit by a state official. In one day, December 6th, the presence of 17 holders of high state positions was even recorded on the field.

State officials are present on the field and in the activities of the Serbian Progressive Party on a daily basis. The presence of government officials was recorded in almost half of the activities of this party – since the beginning of the election campaign, in more than 600 recorded activities of the SNS, one of the representatives of the national, provincial or local authorities or one of the representatives of the state institutions was present.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Today, "Why were the opposition electoral lists rejected in Veliki Gradište and Rača and why were the electoral processes obstructed in Paraćin and Prokuplje?", November 30th, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/fx>

⁵⁶ Dušan Zeka Aleksić, a member of the City Council for Education of Kragujevac, is on the first place and on the list of the 300 Citizens' Group of Kragujevac, and in Batočina, also on the first place and on the list of the Citizens' Group Zajedno za Batočina, is Srđan Biorac, the municipal councilor for urbanism and spatial planning. .

⁵⁷ In Šabac, three minority lists are running for election - two Russian and one Slovak. According to the 2011 census, there were 15 Slovaks and 35 Russians in Šabac out of a total of 115,884 inhabitants. Republic Institute of Statistics, Census 2011, Census data <https://link.crta.rs/fy>

⁵⁸ Time, "Come out and fight", 2018. <https://link.crta.rs/fz>

⁵⁹ The highest state officials actively participated in party activities even before the official start of the election campaign. **In the period from October 1st to December 8th**, as many as 301 participation of some of the ministers in party activities were recorded, that is, on average, during that period , four ministers were at a party celebration, tribune, stand, meeting ...

Across the country, a large number of government activities were observed, primarily related to the field of infrastructure (renovation and reconstruction⁶⁰, road cleaning⁶¹, asphaltting of roads, etc.), economic investments⁶², organising free education programmes for specific groups⁶³, free transportation actions, donations to institutions⁶⁴. **Activities and measures aimed at the most vulnerable and their economic empowerment** (humanitarian packages for refugees and displaced persons)⁶⁵, donations to poor families in the form of food packages, white goods and firewood, introduction of electricity⁶⁶, giving away houses⁶⁷, tour of temporary accommodation for the homeless and proclamation of better conditions⁶⁸). **The focus is on the female population** as a target group⁶⁹, according to which the public authority organised various activities during the entire election campaign, such as conversations and meetings with public officials, education training and professional development and economic empowerment of women.

As in the case of the activities of political parties, it is noticed that the activities of the authorities are more intense in places where local elections are held.

This election cycle is also characterised by a wave of republican one-time financial aid that was distributed to different social groups before the election: pensioners, beneficiaries of social assistance, mothers of children up to the age of 16, high school students and students. It is estimated that the state allocated around 450,000,000 dinars for these benefits.

Among the activities of the public authorities, the so-called **retroactive aid**, so farmers from Kuršumljia whose farms suffered damage due to floods, instead of in May and June, received help now – in the midst of the election campaign⁷⁰, while in Leskovac, money for textbooks was distributed to students in December⁷¹. It was also noticed that in the election race and

⁶⁰ Instagram, GO Palilula, Belgrade, November 23rd, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g0>
Q Media, Kula, "Mileva Agić home facility for adults with mental disabilities opened in Kula", November 30th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g1>

⁶¹ Instagram, Čukarica Municipality, Belgrade, November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g2>

⁶² Instagram, Čukarica Municipality, Belgrade, November 24th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g4>

⁶³ Instagram Palilula City Municipality, Belgrade, November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g5>

Facebook, Opština Mionica, 20 November 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/g3>

⁶⁴ BC Info, Bela Crkva, "Žarko Zrenjanin Elementary School in Bela Crkva received an IT cabinet from MTS", November 20th, 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/g6>

Instagram, SNS Plandište, November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g7>

City of Zrenjanin, Republic of Serbia, "The President of the Sports Federation of Serbia Davor Štefanek handed over sets of equipment, balls and props to the athletes and talked to the children in Tomaševac", November 24th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g8>

Facebook, Dragana Sotirovski's official page, "From today, Niš again has a mobile digital mammogram, a gift from the Princess Katarina Karađorđević Foundation", November 28th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/g9>

Sremske news, "Dom zdravlja Ruma received an ultrasound machine: Improvement of women's health care", November 30, 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/ga>

⁶⁵ City of Zrenjanin, "The City of Zrenjanin was awarded two more contracts in the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration: close to 1.5 million dinars for the procurement of food packages and the economic empowerment of the most vulnerable", November 20th, 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/gc>

Mondo, "HELP FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED FAMILIES! The municipality helped 28 families with packages for firewood - HERE'S HOW MUCH THEY GOT!", November 24th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/ge>

⁶⁶ Facebook, TV 5 Užice, "Sjenica: Sloba Bandović was waiting to move into a house that began to be built in 2018, in the village of Gradac. These days, electricity was introduced, furniture and bathroom renovations arrived", November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/gf>

⁶⁷ Municipality of Kovin, "Three more houses were bought with the funds of the Ministry for the Care of the Village", November 30, 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/gg>

⁶⁸ Instagram, Municipality of Savski venac, Belgrade, November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/gh>

⁶⁹ Instagram, Municipality of Bečej, November 23rd, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/gj>

⁷⁰ Toplicke vesti, "Help to farmers who suffered damage from the flood", November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.a.rs/gk>

⁷¹ City of Leskovac, "Today, 14.3 million dinars were paid from the budget of the city of Leskovac to parents of elementary school students for textbooks", December 6th, 2023. <https://link.crt.a.rs/gl>

winning over voters, the activities of the republican government (such as, for example, the Government's decision to permanently employ a large number of medical and non-medical workers in health institutions) are presented as the success of the local government.

Some municipalities even resorted to recycling news on their websites and accounts on social networks, but also in local media, bragging again and again about projects that have already been completed, or about already announced investments.

It can be seen that in addition to the topics of infrastructure, economy, investments and social policy, special attention is paid to **the renovation of religious buildings**⁷², churches and monasteries, and **proclamations for greater investments in the preservation of religious and cultural heritage**.

4.1.2 One entity: the state and the party

Since the beginning of the election campaign, the boundary between the activities of the ruling party and the state has been difficult to discern. This boundary is blurred through the vaguely separated roles of public and party officials who actively participate in activities⁷³, which, again, are sometimes without clear and unequivocal indications whether they are party or public authority activities, and in which the abuse of public resources has become a practice.⁷⁴ This limit does not exist even in the discourse and communication strategy of the state and the party: addressing the same target groups, through the same narratives, which are dominantly focused on economic and industrial growth and the issue of national identity, and in which the merits are attributed to the president of the state.

The election campaign was marked by a series of cases of abuse of public office. According to observers' reports, in almost 70 recorded cases, high state officials were announced at party events of the Serbian Progressive Party in the capacity of representatives of public authorities, and representatives of municipal authorities appeared in the capacity of public officials in about 100 activities of this party. On the other hand, it was recorded that representatives of the provincial and municipal authorities, as well as representatives of public institutions, were represented as party officials in about 150 public activities, while the highest state officials, representatives of the national authority, participated in almost 50 activities where they were also announced as party officials. The frequency of unclearly separated roles of party and state officials is also illustrated by the fact that observers were unable to unequivocally identify in which capacity public officials were present in about 100 party activities, as well as in about 200 government activities.

Representatives of public authorities, in their capacity as public officials, promoted a political party and even openly invited citizens to vote for the ruling party.⁷⁵ Also, **the practice of public**

⁷² Niške vesti, "Signed agreement on the financing of works for the completion of the church of St. Vasilij Ostroški", November 28th, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gm>

⁷³ For example, from October 1st to December 8th, as many as 68 appearances of Darija Kisić were recorded - both in the capacity of a state official and in the capacity of a party functionary, i.e. in that period she had an average of one appearance on the field per day.

⁷⁴ Ministers are often accompanied in party activities by state secretaries from their ministry, which further highlights their state at the expense of their party function. Instagram, Nikola Selaković, December 11th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/k5>

⁷⁵ Instagram, SNS Smederevska Palanka, November 15th, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/gn>
Instagram, SNS Smederevska Palanka, November 14th, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/go>

officials continuing to visit places on the same day (sometimes several events within one visit) both in the capacity of public and party officials, abusing public resources. Abuse of public resources was recorded in about 260 cases, of which 91% of cases were committed by the ruling party.

It is also common for **public officials to promote public works and activities on their social networks, citing party slogans and markings or tagging party pages**.⁷⁶.

On the other hand, **the activities and works of public authorities are still regularly promoted on party accounts and pages**⁷⁷.

Highlighting the party affiliation of personnel in public sector institutions⁷⁸ which must not be connected to any political organisation, can be interpreted as a form of manipulation because the party intentionally identifies itself with institutions that should serve citizens regardless of their political orientation. In addition, **this gesture suggests that the criteria for the selection of managers in the public sector are primarily political, not professional**.

In the activities of the Serbian Progressive Party, state symbols (e.g. the coat of arms on the activists' uniforms) or **the recognisable AV logo stand out in the foreground**. In the course of party activities, **the abuse of symbols of cities and municipalities, premises and logos of public companies** was observed. This type of abuse is especially present in promotional video materials⁷⁹ in which, in addition to clips from gatherings, meetings, conversations with citizens and other party activities, employees of public companies also appear, often in front of or in official premises and vehicles. Projects financed by foreign donations are also mentioned in these videos, which makes these projects part of the party's propaganda⁸⁰. Abuses are also observed in posts on social networks in which the ruling party promotes public affairs⁸¹, attributing the credit for the success in the work of the public authority to the political party⁸².

And the discourse of representatives of public authorities and representatives of the ruling party is coherent. For example, strengthening the narrative about the elements of national identity (concern about religion⁸³ and cultural heritage) in the government's activities

⁷⁶ Instagram, Miroslav Petković, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gp>

Instagram, Miroslav Petković, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gg>

Instagram, Miroslav Petković, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gr>

Facebook, Boško Ničić, November 23rd 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gt>

⁷⁷ Instagram, SNS Plandište, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gv>

Facebook, SNS OO Surčin, Beograd, November 26th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gw>

⁷⁸ The press release of the Serbian Progressive Party (Ljubovija) announced: "THE HOME OF HEALTH IN LJUBOVIJA RECEIVED A DIRECTOR FROM THE RANKS OF THE SNS, THE RESULTS ARE ALREADY VISIBLE AFTER LESS THAN A MONTH"

Instagram, SNS Ljubovija, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gx>

⁷⁹ Instagram, SNS Valjevo, November 20th 2023, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/gy>

Instagram, SNS Krupanj, November 30th, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/gz>

Facebook, SNS Petrovac na Mlavi, November 30th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/h0>

Instagram, SNS Savski Venac, Belgrade, November 22nd, 2023 <https://link.crta.rs/h1>

X (Twitter), Merošina SNS, December 5th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/h2>

⁸⁰ Instagram, SNS Babušnica, December 9th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/h3>

⁸¹ Instagram, SNS Novi Beograd, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/h4>

⁸² Instagram, SNS Ljubovija, November 20th 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/gx>

Pirot Plus Online, "Vladan Vasić, holder of the list "Aleksandar Vučić - Pirot must not stop": Who tried to politicize the initiative to open a faculty similar to FON in Pirot? It is about an initiative that will historically change the city of Pirot", November 23rd 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/h6>

⁸³ In this area, the statements coming from church circles are also in favour of this discourse.

is in agreement with the ruling party's discourse about a "state-building" party that defends the national interest and national identity. **Addressing the same target groups (socially vulnerable, pensioners, women, minority communities), through the organisation of similar activities, reinforces the impression that the state and the ruling party are acting as one entity in these elections.**

4.1.3 Sharp divisions: "us or them" and "return to the past"

Incendiary rhetoric is one of the main characteristics of this election campaign. More than 200 party activities were recorded that contained elements of a negative campaign against opponents, of which the Serbian Progressive Party was the actor in 57% of cases.

The tension between the two poles on the political scene, power and opposition, is reflected in the entire public space, which was during the campaign oversaturated with inappropriate speech and rhetoric that encourages intolerance, discrimination and violence. Insults and derogatory names also came from the ranks of the ruling coalition⁸⁴ and the opposition⁸⁵. Such messages were not only communicated during party activities, but came also from local media that were also used as channels for proclamations of this nature.⁸⁶ The campaign is also marked by the speeches of certain party officials⁸⁷, in which individuals are attacked on a national basis⁸⁸ and which incites hatred towards them. Of particular concern is the campaign against individuals gathered around "ProGlas", who are accused by the ruling party and pro-regime media close to the authorities of "waging a special war against the state".⁸⁹

The narrative of the representatives of the ruling party suggests that these **elections are fated to take place and that in these elections decisions are not only made about the further direction of Serbia, but also about the preservation of the national identity**⁹⁰. In the dominant narrative, those who support the "Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop" list are presented as guardians of the state and nation, while all others – opposition parties and critics of the government – are presented as those who work to the detriment of national interests. **Highly sensitive issues such as Kosovo, NATO membership, Srebrenica and the introduction of sanctions against Russia are used as key dividing lines.**

Večernje novosti, AFTER THE AGE OF NEMANJIĆ, THE MOST SANCTUARY OF Porfirije IS BEING BUILT TODAY: Those who lead Serbia and Serbia care about spirituality, November 26th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/h7>

⁸⁴ The ruling coalition sent a series of insults and derogatory names to the representatives of the opposition, calling them thieves, pests and thugs, bastards and haters of Serbia, foreign mercenaries, who want to harm the president and his family personally. Facebook, SNS GO Novi Pazar, "Đilas and Marinik's "Serbia against violence" today at the "peaceful" handover of the list in Novi Pazar", November 22, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/h9>

Kikinda portal, "SNS President Miloš Vučević in Kikinda: The elections on December 17th are pre destined to happen, don't let political pests come to us again", December 8th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/ha>

Facebook, SNS Požega, November 16th 2023. <https://link.crt.rs/hb>

SNS Serbia, Kraljevo, "ĐILAS' MARIONETTES DO NOT RESPECT THE SERBIAN HERO", November 20th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hc>

SNS Serbia, Kraljevo, Press Release, November 22nd, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hd>

⁸⁵ Instagram, "Sorry, this is for you", November 19th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/he>

⁸⁶ You Tube, Regional television Kraljevo and Ibarske novosti, "Announcement GrO SNS Kraljevo", November 24th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hf>

⁸⁷ Nataša Jovanović, Member of Parliament, on her Instagram profile called the representative of the opposition, Ponoš, a fraud and a manipulator, calling him names because of his Croatian citizenship. Instagram, Nataša Jovanović Kragujevac, SNS Serbia, November 22, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hg>

⁸⁸ Instagram, Nebojša Bakarec, SNS Serbia, November 26th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hh>

⁸⁹ Instagram, Branislav Malović, member of the SNS presidency, November 23rd, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hi>

Instagram, Naš blok 22, <https://link.crt.rs/hj>

⁹⁰ X (Twitter), SNS OO Indija, November 28th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/hk>

Although he is no longer formally the president of the Serbian Progressive Party, the country's president, Aleksandar Vučić, represents the central figure after whom the ruling list is named and bases its campaign on the "AV" brand. **The party, the state and the people are brought under this central figure in the campaign, insinuating that they are on the same side, a kind of unique entity, which effectively equates Aleksandar Vučić with not only the party, but also the state and the people.** This deepens the polarisation to a dangerous level, because it is suggested that citizens who do not support the president are, consequently, citizens who are against their people and their country, that is, enemies of the state and the people. There are numerous examples that support this narrative: "Every day it is revealed more and more what kind of traitors and anti-Serbs make up Đilas's NATO list of Serbia against violence"⁹¹; "All in all, we see that this is an anti-Serbian group, a nasty piece of work, Đilas, and an even nastier – foreign embassies."^{92 93} Also, insisting in the campaign on the unity of the entity implying the entire people, national and religious affiliation, opens the possibility for the kind of polarisation that a country with a recent history like Serbia should not allow.

On the other hand, the speeches of the opposition leaders are dominated with the attitude that **there is no place for ideological turmoil** in these elections, but that the **only goal is the overthrow of the government.** The representatives of the opposition presented this message with a reminder of the affairs that marked the rule of the Serbian Progressive Party. Hence, during the campaign, one could hear the opinion that the opposition parties do not rule out the possibility of forming a "technical government" that would provide the basic conditions for democratic elections that would be called after the scheduled period.

Recent history can be found in the narratives of both the opposition and the ruling coalition. While the opposition, for its part, recalls the role of the leading actors of the current ruling parties in the politics and events of the 1990s, the ruling parties have built another version of recent history, according to which the most difficult events of the recent past happened between 2000 and 2012.⁹⁴ The ruling party attributes responsibility for those events to all representatives of the opposition, even those parties that were created after 2012 and whose leading people were not involved in politics at all between 2000 and 2012.

4.1.4 Obstructions, provocations and incidents

In this period, new cases of violence and incident situations were recorded. Since the beginning of the campaign, about 40 allegations of cases with elements of verbal or physical violence have been recorded.

⁹¹ 24 seven, "Well, how much longer: The people of Đilas have Serb-haters for export, see how their candidate for deputy brutally insults everything Serbian", (VIDEO) December 7th, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/hm>

⁹² 24 seven, "Anatomy of anti-Serbism: Đilas's NATO list is a breeding ground for haters of the Serbian people, they want to divide us and Russia (PHOTO)", November 27th, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/hn>

⁹³ The dominant narrative of division is reflected in the turmoil in the opposition. In one case, a former member of Zavetnik, who switched to the Russian party, stated that the Zavetniks were "cooperating with Đilas and going to Germany for instructions", which is identical to the ruling party's narrative.

⁹⁴ In 2000, when the government of Slobodan Milošević was replaced, democratic changes followed in Serbia. However, the Serbian Progressive Party, which came to power in 2012, the period from 2000-2012. calls it the "rule of the yellows", presenting it as the "worst period" of Serbia.

After the arson in Prokuplje⁹⁵, writing of Nazi messages on the house of an opposition activist of Roma nationality⁹⁶ and damage to the car of a journalist of an independent local media⁹⁷, which marked the first half of the campaign, a new series of incidents followed. In the second half of the campaign, harassing phone calls to a party official were recorded⁹⁸, persecution on social networks and threats addressed to the president of the municipality and a party official⁹⁹, destroying billboards¹⁰⁰, obstructions when setting up stands¹⁰¹, violent destruction of stands¹⁰², breaking the glass at the party office¹⁰³, physical attacks on protest organisers¹⁰⁴, breaking into party offices and attacking female activists¹⁰⁵, alleges physical attacks¹⁰⁶. There are also incidents in smaller communities in which the locals were intimidated because they signed their support for the opposition list for the local elections, while in one village near Pirot a local was beaten with a shovel.¹⁰⁷

There are more and more frequent allegations of attacks on activists of the Serbian Progressive Party, which the public usually learns about through party proclamations. **The CRTA Observation Mission tried to verify and gather additional information about the allegations in the statement, but calls to the Serbian Progressive Party for a meeting went unanswered.**

The case of the MP of the opposition party stands out, who was first publicly called a “human disgrace” by the president with insinuations that the government had compromising information about him, only to be contacted by unknown persons who informed him that they had compromising material¹⁰⁸, which was then published, first on social networks, and then in the media. This case was in the focus of the media for days, and the ruling party used the whole case for reckoning with the opposition¹⁰⁹.

Obstructions were also noted during the collection and verification of signatures of support for electoral lists.¹¹⁰ This type of obstruction, which mostly refers to the suspicions of opposition

⁹⁵ N1, “Dad, why are they doing this to us”: The private property of the president of GrO DS in Prokuplje was set on fire”, November 20th, 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/ho>

⁹⁶ N1, “People’s Movement of Serbia: After Miroslav Aleksić’s forum, Nazi messages on the house of an opposition activist of Roma nationality”, November 21st, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/hp>

⁹⁷ Voice of Šumadija, “Ritma grada journalist’s car smashed”, November 21st, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/hr>

⁹⁸ N2, “Violeta Marković: I experienced harassment and persecution by a person close to SNS”, November 22nd, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/hs>

⁹⁹ E Vršac, “How to describe this kind of hatred? Detained convicted rapist who persecuted the president of the Municipality of Alibunar”, December 1st, 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/hu>

¹⁰⁰ N1, “Coalition HOPE: The government destroys our billboards”, November 21st, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/hv>

¹⁰¹ N1, “How progressives led by the director of the PIO fund provoke the opposition”, November 21st, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/hx>

¹⁰² X (Twitter), SNS Medijana-Niš, November 25th 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/hy>

¹⁰³ Instagram, SNS Grbavica, Novi Sad, November 19th 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/f5>

¹⁰⁴ Radio hundred plus, “Raška protest organiser attacked against violence”, November 29, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/i0>

¹⁰⁵ Instagram, SNS Novi Beograd, November 30th, 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/i1>

¹⁰⁶ Instagram, SNS Novi Beograd, December 6th 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/i2>

¹⁰⁷ X (Twitter), Džunić Čedica, December 6th 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/i3>

¹⁰⁸ X (Twitter), Đorđe Miketić, November 27th, 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/i4>

¹⁰⁹ Informer, “Brnabić: The thesis that Vučić is to blame for Miketić snorting cocaine is a new level of opposition madness”, December 1st, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/i5>

SNS Serbia, “Nikolić: Đilas insults the intelligence of all normal people”, December 2nd, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/i6>

X (Twitter), Luka Kebara, 1 December 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/i7>

¹¹⁰ Nova, “Ecological Uprising: Safet Pavlović ordered the head of the municipal administration to take out the book of certificates from the municipality, citizens were forced to sign the certificates in Petrovac na Mlava”, November 20th, 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/i8>

papers that notaries and public notaries obstructed the submission of signatures according to the directive, was recorded in 19 cities and municipalities.¹¹¹.

4.1.5. Intimidation, pressure, bribery and misuse of personal data

In addition to inappropriate communication between political actors, incendiary rhetoric and attacks, **this election campaign is marked by a series of activities in which the dignity of citizens and their right to freedom of choice, but also to privacy, is threatened.**

In more than 110 activities throughout Serbia, elements of pressure were recorded primarily on citizens, but also on political actors. Observers' reports and interviews conducted with citizens from different parts of Serbia (since the beginning of the campaign, 18 interviews have been conducted with victims of pressure¹¹²) record increasingly unscrupulous forms of political pressure, which are accompanied by threats and intimidation. It has been recorded that citizens are forced to join the party, to collect certain and capillary votes and to go to party meetings and gatherings.

The CRTA's interlocutors refer to the pressures in the public sector and the control and censorship that exists in collectives of public institutions. One of the interlocutors, an employee of the city administration, points out that no one in her collective is spared from "working for the party" – going to rallies and collecting safe votes. This interlocutor also refers to the additional pressure on employees that is created due to the struggle of managers "for votes", as they are "competing" with one another because their functions and further advancement (both in the party hierarchy and in the hierarchy at work) depend on the number of safe votes. One of the victims of the pressures, a public sector worker, testified that she was intimidated because she no longer wanted to be a member of a certain party (she received threatening messages by phone, her car tyres were slashed). This interlocutor also experienced threats of violence at the workplace, and as a "punishment" she was moved to a lower position with a reduced salary. The second interlocutor was pressured by her superior to "do him a favour in order not to fulfil the quota" and change her place of residence in order to vote at another polling station. There was also pressure on health workers, who were forced to register in the list of safe votes.

Observers note that employees in the public sector were especially exposed to pressure in connection with attending the rally of the Serbian Progressive Party on December 2nd. On the eve of this rally, observers also reported on the pressures on transporters, as well as on the owners of private companies who received quotas for the number of employees they must bring to the rally. Also, it was recorded that citizens were offered money (2,500 dinars) to attend this event.

CRTA records disturbing allegations about pressures on old and demented persons, users of nursing homes. According to the statements of two interlocutors (a person employed in a nursing home and a person who is a family member of a beneficiary of a nursing home), the employees put pressure on the beneficiaries through explicit blackmail to provide support to the party. Also, CRTA recorded statements that employees vote instead of beneficiaries of these institutions. **Manipulation of the elderly, demented and persons with health**

¹¹¹ Barajevo, Kučevo, Medijana, Novi Kneževac, Palilula (Niš), Pančevo, Paraćin, Požega, Sopot, Veliko Gradište, Vlasotince, Žagubica.

¹¹² Interviews were conducted with interlocutors from the following cities and municipalities: Backa Palanka, Novi Kneževac, Pećinci, Stara Pazova, Kula, Kovin, Novi Sad, Kučevo, Leskovac, Zrenjanin, Mataruška Banja, Belgrade.

problems has been recorded in the activities of both parties and public authorities: tours and filming of these persons without regard for their dignity¹¹³, exerting pressure on the beneficiaries of nursing homes (to become so-called safe votes), photographing and filming partially clothed citizens during medical examinations (ECG, mammography).

In the campaign, various examples of abuse of children were observed that crossed the boundaries of the forms of this phenomenon present so far, and there was even a case where children were in charge of distributing flyers and promotional material.¹¹⁴

Other vulnerable categories of our society are not spared from political pressures either. **The CRTA observers note the case of an oncology patient** who testified that she was pressured to join the party so that her name would not be moved on the waiting list for oncology, but also the case of “punishment” and denial of social assistance to users of the social work centre who supported opposition electoral list¹¹⁵.

This election campaign too points to the normalisation of electoral clientelism, which is revealed as one of the basic instruments in the fight for votes. Observers recorded cases in which citizens and sympathisers and party members received various gifts of high value (firewood, televisions, refrigerators, bicycles, walkers, computers...). In Inđija, there was also a case of distribution of personalised vouchers in the amount of 3,000 dinars to supporters of the ruling party, which are valid only with an ID card and can only be used in local markets. One CRTA’s interlocutor, a beneficiary of social assistance, also testified that representatives of the Serbian Progressive Party contacted him by phone, asked him by name and offered help (firewood and a package of groceries) if he provided political support to this party. The interlocutor also testifies that he received everything he was promised, but also that the party representatives announced to him that he would receive more food packages, as well as that he would be provided with the possibility of voting from home (since he is a person with health problems). Observers also reported cases where the ruling party offered from 2 to 5 thousand dinars on social networks and Viber groups, for a vote but also cases where citizens offered their vote in exchange for money or some other service. The clearest example of this kind is reflected in the “threats” of boycotting elections by citizens in rural areas, if the public authorities do not accept their demands. Those demands, for example, refer to the introduction of more regular public transport between urban and rural areas¹¹⁶, as well as the opening of certain public institutions such as a clinic, pharmacy or post office in the village itself or local community¹¹⁷.

The normalisation and legitimisation of this phenomenon is reinforced by the absence of reaction from the competent institutions, but also by the messages coming from the holders of high state functions. After the journalist’s report, that indicated the potential buying of votes and unauthorised collection of data in the call centre of the Serbian Progressive Party, instead of the reaction of the competent institutions, the president of the

¹¹³ Vojvodina live, “Municipal President Đorđe Radinović visited the oldest fellow citizen in Stara Pazova”, November 23rd, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/i9>

¹¹⁴ This case was recorded in India.

¹¹⁵ Prokuplje Press, “FOR SNS VOTERS THERE IS, FOR THE OTHERS THERE IS NO”, December 10th, 2023. <https://prokupljepress.rs/2023/12/10/za-glasace-sns-ima-za-ostale-nema/>

¹¹⁶ Južne Vesti, “Residents of Aleksinac village Vrelo are looking for transport or they will boycott the elections”, November 18th, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/ib>

¹¹⁷ Južne Vesti, “The residents of the Aleksinac mine are looking for a clinic and a pharmacy, but before the election, because they will not “vote for nothing”, November 4th, 2023. <https://link.crtars.rs/ic>

country, Aleksandar Vučić, visited the call centre and posted a photo and video of the visit on his Instagram profile.¹¹⁸

The last weeks of the election campaign were marked by a series of allegations due to suspicion of misuse of citizens' data and forgery of their signatures for candidacy.¹¹⁹

Of the 14 declared electoral lists in Belgrade, for as many as seven there are allegations of forgery of signatures (**more on this case in chapter 3.1.3 Disputed signatures**). Therefore, CRTA made an official appeal to the competent institutions to react and reminded that such cases in previous election cycles remained without an epilogue.

The CRTA observers' reports, which point to a large number of possible abuses of personal data, are also worrisome. Since the beginning of the election campaign, the CRTA observers have recorded around 90 allegations from citizens about the potential misuse of personal data.

These allegations refer to **the misuse of personal data of social assistance beneficiaries and users of gerontological services for political purposes, prisoners in prisons, pensioners** who received personalised invitations to party events, but also refer to the potential misuse of data **on the health status of citizens** who were invited to party discussion panels on health, in the area that includes the health problems that these citizens have. Moreover, in conversations with CRTA, the interlocutors testify **about the misuse of employee data by employers and superiors in both the public and private sectors.** In one of the allegations, the suspicion is expressed that the party commissioner took identity cards from the beneficiaries of one-time financial aid and instead of these persons submitted the application for aid and then withdrew the money on their behalf¹²⁰.

During the entire election campaign, citizens reported receiving calls from the Serbian Progressive Party in which operators asked for them by name and surname. Some of the citizens who received these phone calls confirmed to the observers that they were not members of the party, and that they had not given their information to any political party. It was also recorded that elderly citizens, whose family members are abroad, were contacted by party operators who addressed them by their name and surname, and then asked about their family members and whether they would vote.

Moreover, as in previous election cycles, observers and citizens reported on a large number of notifications to vote for people who do not live at those addresses, which points to **the possibility of manipulation of the Voters' Register.** Because of these allegations, CRTA appealed to competent institutions and civil servants to conscientiously perform their duties and protect the law, institutions and public interest in elections.

A large number of such allegations leaves room for doubt about the illegal actions of the ruling party, but also points to the weakness of institutions and services that are responsible for the protection of personal data and the right to privacy. The aforementioned phenomena also marked the previous election processes, however, they remained without an adequate institutional epilogue.

¹¹⁸ Instagram, Aleksandar Vučić, December 5th 2023. <https://link.crt.rs/id>

¹¹⁹ Time, "Jelena Zorić: Forging signatures is pure organised crime", November 28th, 2023 <https://link.crt.rs/ie>
Nova, "Criminal charges due to Radet Basta's election list: A woman whose name was misused for a signature spoke out", November 23rd 2023. <https://link.crt.rs/ig>

¹²⁰ Facebook, Danilo Lukić, November 22nd 2023. <https://link.crt.rs/ih>

4.2 Pluralism in the media

4.2.1 Main findings of media monitoring

In the period from November 1st to December 6th, 2023, the media scene in Serbia is characterised by pronounced inequality and imbalance in reporting, which is reflected in the dominance of the ruling majority and the marginalisation of the opposition. The ruling majority took 75 percent of prime time, while the opposition was allocated 25 percent, a deterioration from the previous 2022 election campaign. The imbalance in news programmes is especially pronounced, where the ruling majority occupies over 90 percent of the time, while the opposition has less than 10 percent. This imbalance, together with the tone of reporting that favours the ruling majority, creates a climate of social consensus around the policies of the ruling structure, while at the same time marginalising and discrediting the opposition. Also, the unequal position in the possibility of directly addressing the audience further emphasises this disproportion.

Negative propaganda towards the opposition is particularly pronounced, with a significantly higher percentage of negative tone compared to previous elections. On the portals and front pages of the daily press, the media continued to publish, without any critical review, the narratives set up by the government representatives. While the current government is presented as the only guarantor of Serbia's progress and of preservation of national interests, all other electoral actors are discredited on both personal and political grounds. The media and officials of the ruling party remained synchronised in their messages about the violent opposition, the opposition that recognises the independence of Kosovo, calls the Serbs a "genocide nation" and that, upon coming to power, would impose sanctions on Russia and bring Serbia into NATO.

The role of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, in the media space during this election period is particularly significant. Vučić dominates television with national coverage, occupying almost one third (30 percent) of the time in prime time and as much as 61 percent in news programmes. This disproportionate representation not only confirms Vučić's central position in the political narrative, but also indicates the creation of a climate in which he is portrayed as an irreplaceable leader. The media space devoted to Vučić, with constant direct addresses and broad coverage of party meetings, contributes to creating an image of him as a key actor for the success of the state.

4.2.2 Representation and tone of reporting on political actors

During the first 36 days of the election campaign, the media image in Serbia shows **the maintenance and strengthening** of the already existing **inequality and imbalance** in the representation of political actors on television with national coverage.¹²¹ The analysis of the CRTA Observation Mission shows that **the ruling majority still had a distinctly dominant role** in the media space, occupying 75 percent of the allotted time in extended prime time¹²²,

¹²¹ The sample of observation televisions consists of: public media service RTS1 and four commercial televisions, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV happy and TV B92.

¹²² Primetime means the period from 5:30 p.m. to midnight

while the opposition was allocated 25 percent. This data represents a deterioration compared to the previous year, when the representation of the ruling majority was slightly lower, with 64 percent, and the opposition higher, with 36 percent.

The emphasis on the role of news programmes in relation to electoral blocs is also significant, because news programmes play a significant role in shaping public opinion, often attracting greater viewership and providing a broader context of political events, unlike specific electoral blocs. **Inequality is particularly pronounced in segments of television news programmes with national coverage. In the current campaign, the opposition gets 7 percent of the time in news broadcasts, while the ruling majority gets 93 percent.** This distribution of media space shows the constant that CRTA recorded during the election campaign in 2022, when 96 percent of the time was allocated to the ruling majority and only 4 percent to the opposition, but also in the period between the two election cycles when it was 95 percent for the ruling majority and 5 percent for representatives of the opposition.

The quality of reporting obtained through **the analysis of the tonality of reporting** on different political actors also reflects the bias and unfair approach of the media towards different political actors. The ruling coalition is mostly represented neutrally (75 percent), then positively (24 percent), but almost never negatively (1 percent). On the other hand, the opposition is more often portrayed neutrally (66 percent), but with a significantly higher percentage of negative tone (27 percent) and low percentage of positive tone (7 percent). Compared to last year, when representatives of the opposition were portrayed almost equally both negatively (12 percent) and positively (14 percent), **in the current campaign the opposition is portrayed much more negatively.**

In television news programmes with national coverage, there is an even more drastic imbalance in the way the ruling majority and the opposition are presented. The ruling majority is portrayed either neutrally (85 percent) or positively (15 percent), without any negative tone. This way of reporting **creates an image of the ruling majority as a stable, successful and indisputable actor on the political scene, which encourages the perception of its unquestionable validity and efficiency.** Conversely, the opposition is almost exclusively depicted in a negative context (84 percent), while positive contributions about it are extremely rare, accounting for only one percent of the time. **This media treatment of the opposition not only marginalises them, but also actively discredits them, portraying them as an unfavourable alternative to the current government.**

This polarisation and bias in media reporting between **the ruling majority, which the media has almost no criticism of, and the opposition, which is portrayed as almost exclusively negative, creates a deep political division in the public.** Such an approach not only limits the objective informing of citizens, but also threatens the democratic principles of pluralism and fair and equal representation of all political options.

Within individual media with national coverage, the representation and tone of coverage of political actors varies from television to television, but the differences between the coverage of different televisions are small and all point to bias. TV B92 led the way with the most time dedicated to the ruling majority, as much as 86 percent in prime time compared to 14 percent for the opposition. TV Prva follows with 80 percent in favour of the ruling majority versus 20 percent for the opposition. On TV Pink, the ruling majority is represented 75 percent

of the time, while the opposition has 25 percent. TV Happy and RTS 1 showed a slightly smaller imbalance with 72 percent versus 28 percent, or 65 percent versus 35 percent of the time allocated to the opposition.

When it comes to the tone of reporting, **TV Pink stands out with the most pronounced negative campaign towards the opposition** – 53 percent negative tone, 42 percent neutral and 5 percent positive. **TV B92 follows** with 42 percent negative, 53 percent neutral and 5 percent positive tone. Other televisions have a relatively equal ratio of negative and positive tonality when it comes to reporting on the opposition.

As for **reporting on the ruling majority**, the principle is the same on all televisions: the reporting is mostly positive, while there is almost no negative tone. This **indicates a clear pattern of favouring the ruling majority**, which is maintained regardless of changes in the political landscape or election cycles.

4.2.3 The role of the President of Serbia in the election campaign

The referendum atmosphere created by the media around the personality of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, gained intensity as the campaign progressed. Vučić's media ubiquity is not only the result of his status as the president of the country and holder of the "Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop" list, but is **a reflection of the constant narrative that portrays him as an irreplaceable leader and guardian of national interests.** During the prime time analysis, he occupied almost one third (30 percent) of the media space on televisions with national coverage. **In the first 36 days of the campaign, almost 14,500 seconds were devoted to Vučić in prime time on televisions with national coverage, more than to all representatives of the opposition combined.** Additionally, **in the segments of informative programmes, its representation is even higher** and amounts to 61 percent of the time.

Vučić's exposure in the media during the first 36 days of the campaign clearly indicates a media strategy that places him at the centre of political communication. Compared to last year's parliamentary and presidential elections, his representation remains similar, with 32 percent of the total time allocated to him personally, which, given that this year only parliamentary and not presidential elections are held, indicates **even more pronounced favouritism** in the media.

The way Vučić is portrayed in the media is particularly indicative. The president of the country is presented as a leader who is **responsible for all positive changes in the country**, whose role is essential both domestically and internationally. With this type of reporting, the media creates the image that **his presence on the political scene has no adequate alternative.**

The constant focus on Vučić in the media is supported **by numerous direct addresses on television with national coverage**, as well as by the number of interviews he gave during the campaign. During the campaign alone, Vučić directly addressed the audience "behind the small screen" 38 times, of which even 10 were interviews. **Every party gathering of the Serbian Progressive Party was widely broadcast on over 30 local and cable television stations**, further enhancing its media presence. The number of direct addresses by the

president since the beginning of the year, which amounts to 286, recorded by CRTA, only further emphasises the intensity and scope of his campaign.

4.2.4 Media language in the service of deepening divisions in society

In relation to the pre-election period, the majority of the media remained consistent in following the narratives put forward by representatives of the authorities, primarily the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. In the first weeks of the election campaign, the media published daily content in which the actions of the opposition were presented as a threat to citizens. Headlines predicting that the opposition wants to “*come to power by force*” and “*set the country on fire*”¹²³ were only an upgrade to the claims of the highest state officials about the “*chaos*” that the opposition leaders are allegedly preparing for December 18th.¹²⁴ In the continuation of the campaign, too, the media space was filled mainly with messages sent to the electorate by officials of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. Those messages, which the media transmitted without critical review, were based on divisions between those who are the “*future*” and those who are the “*past*” of Serbia, but also other types of threats based on identity issues such as the Kosovo issue, attitudes towards the crimes of the 1990s, towards Russia and the NATO alliance. How the President of Serbia set the narrative that a vote for any other list is “*a vote for Đilas*”¹²⁵, other officials of SNS and the media repeated that in the elections on December 17th “*the choice is between Vučić and Đilas*”¹²⁶, that is, that he is also a “*voice for the false right*”¹²⁷ at the same time, the vote for the leader of the Party of Freedom and Justice. The discourse of division was also created through the idea that Aleksandar Vučić is the one who “*does not give in to his people*”¹²⁸, “*returns everything Serbian*”¹²⁹ and is synonymous with “*concern for the common man*”¹³⁰, while on the other side are opposition leaders who are “*haters of everything Serbian*”¹³¹, work “*against their own people*”¹³² and “*everything for the public function*”.¹³³ Apart from relying on the thesis of the President of Serbia that Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and the opposition have only “*one goal*” – “*to*

¹²³ Informer, “They would set the country on fire again! The people of Đilas want to come to power by force”, November 16th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/e3>

¹²⁴ Kurir, ““DAILY BLAME YOUR OWN COUNTRY” Brnabić on the lies of the opposition: Their goal is CHAOS in Serbia already on December 18 - they have two campaigns!”, November 9th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/ii>

¹²⁵ YouTube, Aleksandar Vučić, “Vučić: People who love Serbia are the greatest strength of our country”, November 9th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/ij>

¹²⁶ Serbian Telegraph, “VUČEVIĆ DECIDES TO ORDER: In the elections on December 17th, the choice is between Vučić and Đilas”, November 29th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/il>

¹²⁷ B92, “Now it is clear: A vote for the false right is a vote for Đilas”, November 24th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/im>

¹²⁸ Serbian telegraph, “Don’t give to your people: Vučić žestoko odbrusio šefu NATO”, November 22nd 2023, <https://link.crtars/in>

¹²⁹ Serbian telegraph, “SHAME! VUCIĆ IS RETURNING WHAT IS SERBIAN, AND THE OPPOSITION HAS STARTED THE HUNT FOR THE PRESIDENT! Another proof that they are working against their own people - a national treasure returned to Serbia!”, November 13th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/io>

¹³⁰ Politics, “Caring for the Common Man”, December 3rd, 2023, <https://link.crtars/iq>

¹³¹ Informer, “This is what it looks like when haters of everything Serbian unite! Guyon reacted to the opposition’s shameful statements about Novak Djokovic”, November 25, 2023, <https://link.crtars/is>

¹³² Serbian telegraph, “SHAME! VUCIĆ IS RETURNING WHAT IS SERBIAN, AND THE OPPOSITION HAS STARTED THE HUNT FOR THE PRESIDENT! Another proof that they are working against their own people - a national treasure returned to Serbia!”, November 11th, 2023, <https://link.crtars/iu>

¹³³ Kurir, “DILAS LIKE A GOLD FISH wants a pro-Brussels government in which Milica the Oathkeeper and Boško do not give him two percent! But here they are united - EVERYTHING FOR THE FUNCTION”. November 23rd 2023, <https://link.crtars/iu>

replace Vučić¹³⁴, the media labelled certain opposition leaders as “*Shiptar darlings*”¹³⁵, “*stars of Kurti’s media*”¹³⁶, it was written that their policy, according to the president of the country, is “*the best for Kurti*”¹³⁷, as well as that “*they are silent all the time about Kurti’s terror against the Serbs, and during the campaign they suddenly remembered the brothers from the heart of Serbia*”.¹³⁸ From the point of view of the most influential media, in addition to the specifically mentioned opposition leaders, the “*tycoon machinery*” was also set up against Aleksandar Vučić.¹³⁹ The president of the country and the holder of the “*Serbia must not stop*” list was portrayed as a “*victim of media terror*” in “*tycoon magazines*”¹⁴⁰, as the critical media TV N1 and TV Nova were called. Those television stations were also accused of “*poisoning with hatred*”¹⁴¹, “*brutal violence*”, “*incitement*”, while the intention to “*lynch*” the head of state was attributed to them.¹⁴² President Vučić’s narrative that the opposition would make a decision on Serbia’s joining NATO, that it advocates sanctions against the Russian Federation, that it claims that the Serbs are a “*genocide nation*”, and that Kosovo would “*get a seat in the United Nations*” upon their arrival¹⁴³ remained in the media throughout the campaign. Apart from the video with the statements of the candidates of the “*Serbia against violence*” list about the genocide in Srebrenica, which was broadcast on November 13th in the National News Programme on TV Pink, but also published on mainstream portals, citizens could also read that “*fake right-wingers want to come to power with those who believe Kosovo is independent, Srebrenica is a genocide and who are in favour of sanctions against Russia*”.¹⁴⁴ Regarding these topics, too, the media pointed out the difference between the president who “*protects the holy places*” when he “*doesn’t let the tycoons sell Kosovo*”¹⁴⁵ and the opposition that “*wrote off Kosovo and Meohija*”.¹⁴⁶ The media and representatives of the government remained synchronised in the narrative about the violent opposition, through the statements of the President of Serbia that the “*Serbia against violence*” coalition consists of “*nothing but*

¹³⁴ Informer, “President Vučić revealed Kurti’s intentions: He has only one goal with the opposition!”, November 26th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/iw>

¹³⁵ Informer.rs, “Shiptar’s darling! Kurti rolls out the red carpet for Miloš the Frenchman!”, November 22nd, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/iy>

¹³⁶ Hello, “ĐILAS’S PRIDE IS THE STAR OF KURTI’S MEDIA Albanian portals rejoice because he accused Serbia of bombing in 1999”, December 6th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/iz>

¹³⁷ Informer, “Vučić on Miloš Jovanović: He would come to power with Đilas, and there everything was bully after bully; Their policy is the best for Kurti!”, November 26th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j1>

¹³⁸ Kurir, “A FLOCK OF LOCUSTS WHEN THEIR TIME IS NOT THERE They are silent all the time about KURTI’S TERROR against the Serbs, and in the campaign they suddenly remembered the brothers from the heart of Serbia”, December 8th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j2>

¹³⁹ Informer, “A video that all of Serbia must see! The tycoon machinery hits President Vučić”, November 29th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j3>

¹⁴⁰ Serbian telegraph, “THE PRESIDENT OF SERBIA IS A VICTIM OF UNPRECEDENTED MEDIA TERROR IN THE TYCOON NEWSPAPERS: 120 hours of spitting on Vučić”. November 29th 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j5>

¹⁴¹ Kurir, “HYPNOSIS WITH VUČIĆE AND HATE POISONING: N1 and Nova S slander the president, devote the entire program in November to bashing Vučić”, December 1st, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j6>

¹⁴² Serbian telegraph, “ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ IS A VICTIM OF MEDIA TERROR! 120 HOURS OF BRUTAL VIOLENCE! Sholak’s media wants to lynch the president - they are inciting THIS!”, November 29th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j8>

¹⁴³ YouTube, Aleksandar Vučić, “Vučić: People who love Serbia are the greatest strength of our country”, November 9th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/ij>

¹⁴⁴ Alo, “Fake right-wingers want to come to power with those for whom Kosovo is independent, Srebrenica is a genocide and who are in favour of sanctions against Russia”, December 4th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/j9>

¹⁴⁵ Informer, “THE PRESIDENT OF SERBIA, ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ, GUARDS THE SAINTS: I will not let the tycoons sell Kosovo”, November 6th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jb>

¹⁴⁶ Informer, “THE OPPOSITION HAS WRITTEN OFF COSMET. RADOMIR LAZOVIĆ: We are ready to discuss the recognition of Kosovo DEJAN NEDELJKOVIĆ: Đilas and his team are not interested in Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija”, November 27th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jd>

bullies”,¹⁴⁷ and headlines such as “*Đilas’s gang beat the election commission*”¹⁴⁸ or they are “*dark minds*” and “*phony fighters against violence*” who want to “*change power on the street*”, thereby “*bringing matches to gunpowder and dangerously fuelling hatred*”.¹⁴⁹

Although not to the same extent as the opposition leaders, some officials of the Socialist Party of Serbia also played the role of villains on the front pages and portals. Referring to unnamed sources, the media wrote about “*murky actions*”¹⁵⁰, “*crime*”¹⁵¹, “*theft and machinations*”¹⁵² socialists, “*secret life*” to which they linked “*fornication and debauchery*”, and accusations that “*closed parties with narcotics and prostitutes are organised*” for some “*false patriots*” from the SPS.¹⁵³ By discrediting all other election actors, the media portrayed Aleksandar Vučić, the president of the country and the holder of the “Serbia must not stop” list, as the only true protector of national, not personal, interests.

Miketić case

A further step in **dealing with political opponents of the ruling party, endangering dignity and the right to privacy**, was made in the case of Đorđe Miketić, a candidate for councillor of the Belgrade Assembly on the “Serbia Against Violence” list. Apart from the media aspect, which was also controversial for the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM)¹⁵⁴, in this case the participation of government representatives, especially the Security and Information Agency (SIA), was also problematic.

On November 27th, Miketić informed the public via the “X” social network that he had received a message from an unknown number containing his intimate photo, stating that it was “*proof that the SIA does not protect the state but works for Aleksandar Vučić and SNS regime, targeting the opposition and citizens*”.¹⁵⁵ Since that moment, the Security and Information Agency has issued two proclamations. In the first proclamation, the Agency stated that the photo was “*only a fragment of a longer video, the creation of which the SIA bears no responsibility*” and then called on Miketić to “*stop the attacks on the security services of the Republic of Serbia and the President of the Republic of Serbia and that, since he opened up the topic in public of his private video, publicly announce how, where and under what circumstances and by which person the video of him and a certain person was made, as well*

¹⁴⁷ YouTube, Aleksandar Vučić, “Vučić: We have returned life and safety to Serbia”, November 26th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/je>

¹⁴⁸ Hello, “Madness - Bullies against violence: Đilas residents beat the election commission”, November 24th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/je>

¹⁴⁹ Kurir, “DARK MINDS Quasi-fighters against violence would change the government at any cost on the street! They bring matches and powder and DANGEROUSLY FOSTER HATRED”, November 28th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jh>

¹⁵⁰ Courier, “SHUDDY ACTIONS: Bajatović and the failed “South Stream” served for machinations! Doubled Serbia’s expenses, wasted 30 million euros!”, November 11th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/ji>

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Kurir, “Theft and machinations of another socialist - Forest Mafia: Dačić’s former son-in-law turned a public company into a private farm through criminal activities - felling forests and reselling, was also caught in taking bribes?!” November 15th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jj>

¹⁵³ Kurir, “Fornication and debauchery - The secret life of a socialist: For Braunović, in a luxury hotel in Ivanjica, they are organising closed parties with narcotics and prostitutes?!” November 26th, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jk>

¹⁵⁴ Regulatory body for electronic media, Initiated proceedings against PMU TV Pink, December 1, 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jl>

¹⁵⁵ X (Twitter), Đorđe Miketić, November 27th 2023, <https://link.crta.rs/jm>

as *what the video contains*.¹⁵⁶ A part of the explicit video then reached social networks, and the entire case was commented on by the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, in a guest appearance on TV Happy. Stating that Miketić is a “*human disgrace*”, the president also noted that “*unfortunately*” he cannot talk about “*everything he knows*”.¹⁵⁷ After President Vučić, the SIA spoke out once again and, as it says in the proclamation, “*on the occasion of the continuation of attacks by certain media on the Security and Information Agency*”. In a written address to the public, the SIA said that it “*will not allow itself to be dragged into the political games of Mr. Miketić and his political options*”, and then repeated that “*for the creation and dissemination of the mentioned material, due to its inappropriate content, it bears no responsibility*”.¹⁵⁸ The alternating comments of the President of Serbia and the Security and Information Agency were followed by headlines about the “*scandalous behaviour of Đilas’s run*.”¹⁵⁹, about how “*people set aside money for MPs’ salaries, Miketić spends it on cocaine*”¹⁶⁰ so “*he blames the government for personal fornication and immorality*”.¹⁶¹ The whole case took on worrying proportions when on December 1st, in the morning programme TV Pink, with blurred faces and private parts of the body, and in the pre-election programme, a part of the explicit video that was already circulating on social networks was shown. On the same day, the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media initiated proceedings against Pink Television in an emergency session due to the well-founded assumption that there had been a violation of the Law on Electronic Media, the Rulebook on the Protection of Human Rights in the Provision of Media Services, as well as the Rulebook on the Protection of the Rights of Minors in the Provision of Media Services.¹⁶² Đorđe Miketić announced on December 1st, after the broadcast of the video on TV Pink, that he was withdrawing from the campaign, but not from the electoral list.¹⁶³

Therefore, in addition to regular actors – government representatives, media and analysts, the Security and Information Agency also participated in this targeting campaign. This has once again moved the border in settling scores between the ruling structure with political opponents, through the unequivocal abuse of the institutions of the security system.

5 CONTROL INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES

5.1 Anti-Corruption Agency

The work of the Anti-Corruption Agency (further: Agency) in this reporting period mostly related to informing political entities about the method and standards for submitting a preliminary report on the costs of the election campaign, as well as deciding on applications from natural

¹⁵⁶ BIA, Press release, November 28th, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jn>

¹⁵⁷ YouTube, Aleksandar Vučić, “Vučić: Massive changes await Serbia”, November 29, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jo>

¹⁵⁸ BIA, Press release, November 29th, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jp>

¹⁵⁹ Informer, “Scandalous behavior of the Đilas race: He was drugged and filmed himself, then attacked the state to spy on him?!”, November 30th, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jq>

¹⁶⁰ Alo, “The people set aside money for MPs’ salaries, Miketić spends it on cocaine”, November 30th, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jr>

¹⁶¹ Kurir, “MIKETICU JEL’ YOU ARE FIGHTING FOR THIS GOVERNMENT AND LAWS MP’s salary for prostitutes and drugs, and the government blames you for personal FORNICATION and IMMORALITY”, November 30th, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/k6>

¹⁶² Regulatory body for electronic media, “Initiated proceedings against PMU TV Pink”, December 1st, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jl>

¹⁶³ Nova, “I will not back down in the face of violence: Miketić withdraws from the campaign, but remains on the election list”, December 1st, 2023, <https://link.crt.a.rs/jt>

and legal persons related to potential cases of violations of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities and the Law on preventing corruption. The Agency's action can only be considered as **limited proactive** in the segment of informing political entities about the submission of a preliminary report on election campaign expenses, which the CRTA Observation Mission assesses as an insufficient level of proactiveness. **It can be noted that the Agency acted on the complaints of natural and legal persons within the short deadlines prescribed by law, however, the interpretation of legal provisions in favour of political parties and public officials in some borderline cases of abuse of public resources remained disputed.**

On its website, the Agency published news and a statement related to the preliminary report on the expenses of the election campaign. The Agency informed the political entities that, in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Financing of Political Activities, they are obliged to submit a preliminary report on the costs of the election campaign in electronic and written form by December 10th, 2023. The preliminary report refers to all income and expenses related to the election campaign from the day the election is announced until 15 days before the day set for voting, which means that this report covers the period from November 1st to December 2nd, 2023. The Agency informed political entities in detail that they are obliged to submit the report in both electronic and written form, and it was pointed out that it is now possible for political entities that have a qualified certificate for electronic signature to submit reports only in electronic form if the report contains an electronic signature. Finally, it was clarified what the preliminary report should contain. The preliminary report shows all data on income and expenses incurred in connection with the election campaign, that is, all data on the origin, amount and structure of collected and spent funds from public and private sources, credits and loans are shown.

When it comes to the Agency's decisions on applications by natural and legal persons, i.e. decisions in proceedings initiated ex officio, as of December 10th, 2023, **the Agency has published a total of 15 decisions on the website related to applications by natural and legal persons. due to violation of the Law on Financing of Political Activities.** It should be noted that the Agency does not have the obligation to publicly announce decisions regarding the violation of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities, in the event that it initiates proceedings ex officio. Also, when it comes to deciding on violations of the provisions of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, the Agency has no obligation to publish decisions that establish that there has been no violation of the law. In the case where a violation of the above-mentioned law is established, only decisions are published by which the measure of public publication of the recommendation for dismissal from public office and the measure of public publication of the decision on the violation of this law were imposed on the public official (they are published on the Agency's website and in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia"), while the decisions imposing a warning measure (in the case of a minor violation of the law) are not publicly announced.

As in previous campaigns, the impression remains that the Agency does not have the professional integrity to express its independence in its full capacity and sanction violations of the law by the President of the Republic of Serbia even in situations where it is more than obvious, as is the case with his public address at a pre-election rally political party Serbian Progressive Party, when he used his public function, i.e. the public gathering in which he participated, for the promotion of the political party, Serbian Progressive Party, of which he is

a member and a member of the Presidency of that political party, i.e. for the public presentation of the proclaimed electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”, as well as for calling voters to vote for that political party. Furthermore, on that occasion, the President of the Republic did not unequivocally present to the public whether he was presenting the position of the authority in which he performs his public function or the position of the said political party, which is undoubtedly a violation of the imperative legal norm from the Law on Prevention of Corruption.

5.2 Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media

The work of the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM) during the entire campaign was characterised by a lack of transparency and by pronounced passivity. Despite the fact that reporting every fifteen days was announced in the Campaign Monitoring Methodology, REM did not publish any cross-section of the findings of its monitoring or data on any actions it initiated ex officio or upon reports. In the atmosphere of impunity fostered by REM, an extremely negative campaign against opposition representatives on television with national coverage escalated with the showing of a private pornographic video of an opposition candidate in the morning programme on TV Pink. Although it initiated proceedings in that case without delay, REM failed to issue a measure for such a drastic violation of the law within the short legal term, postponing the decision for a moment that will be too late to change the behaviour of the media service provider during the current election campaign.

6.2.2 REM methodology and activities

Since the proclamation of the elections, the REM Council held seven sessions and decided on a total of 296 items on the agenda.¹⁶⁴, of which a total of three points related to the election campaign. The REM Council touched on the election campaign at the meeting held on November 2nd, when the methodology and sample for monitoring the campaign were determined, and then only at the meeting urgently convened on December 1st, after television with national coverage, in the election part of its morning programme, showed a private recording of a member of parliament and a candidate on the opposition electoral list.

Although in the Campaign Monitoring Methodology in 2023, REM announced that it would report on the campaign every fifteen days, until the date of the conclusion of this report, REM has not published any periodic report, nor has it issued a statement or finding of the previous control of the behaviour of media service providers during this year’s campaign.

REM’s failure to address the election campaign during the entire first month of its duration was interrupted on December 1st, 2023, when in the election part of its morning programme, Pink television showed a private video of the pornographic content of the MP and candidate for councillor in the Belgrade City Assembly, Đorđe Miketić. The REM Council reacted by convening an emergency session at which the procedure of imposing a measure on Pink TV was initiated.¹⁶⁵ In the press release published the same afternoon, it was stated that the proceedings against TV Pink were initiated due to the well-founded assumption that there was

¹⁶⁴ In this period, REM was primarily concerned with determining the amount of annual fees for media service providers.

¹⁶⁵ N1, “Explicit recording on the national frequency and announcement of the continuation: REM reacted, pending punishment”, December 1st, 2023. <https://link.crt.rs/fc>

a violation of the provisions of the Law on Electronic Media, which refer to the protection of the rights of minors and respect for personal dignity.¹⁶⁶ In doing so, REM stated that the content of the show was “clearly of a political pre-election character (and marked as such)”, but that “a sexual act is a completely private event that cannot be linked to the nature of information related to political life, which by definition is a public issue”. The proclamation also stated that the Council will decide on possible protective measures against TV Pink at the next session, which will be held in the first half of December this year. However, the decision in this case was not included in the agenda of the next session, held on December 8th.¹⁶⁷

It is indisputable that by showing such content, Pink television first of all violated its obligations related to respecting the dignity and privacy of the personality of Đorđe Miketić, and that the ban on publishing pornography, as content harmful to minors, was violated. Nonetheless, the fact that TV Pink marked the part of the programme in which the disputed content was shown as an election programme was ignored. This circumstance is significant because the Regulator, only in cases where the media service provider violates its obligations in relation to the election campaign, has the obligation to impose a protective measure on the media service provider within 72 hours after reaching a conclusion on the initiation of the procedure. By treating this case outside the context of the election campaign, REM missed the opportunity and obligation to make a decision on the possible imposition of a measure on Pink Television in a timely manner – while the campaign is still ongoing and even if such a measure can have a positive effect on changing the behaviour of the media service provider during the election campaigns.

In the atmosphere of impunity that the Regulator carefully cultivates in this election campaign, the case of showing a private video of an opposition candidate on television with national coverage does not come as a complete surprise. With reports to REM, CRTA tried to draw attention to the fact that an extremely aggressive campaign against opposition candidates is underway on Pink TV – from the placement of videos in which they attack unilaterally¹⁶⁸, through those in which they are dehumanised¹⁶⁹, and up to the videos in which the opposition candidates are marked as people who draw a target on the head of the President of the Republic.¹⁷⁰ In the election programme, the same television showed an almost half-hour speech by the Prime Minister, who, leading the campaign from the position of a public official, accused the opposition of preparing chaos and destabilising the state if it loses the elections.¹⁷¹ Pink Television did not hesitate to [relativise the genocide in Srebrenica](#) for the purposes of the election campaign.¹⁷²

The CRTA's reports, however, did not provoke any reaction from the Regulator. There is no information that REM decided on any report submitted to it during the campaign so far, which is especially worrying if one takes into account the fact that the new legal framework obliges REM to react promptly upon learning of violations of the law.

¹⁶⁶ Regulatory body for electronic media, “Initiated proceedings against PMU TV Pink”, December 1st, 2023 <https://link.crtars.rs/fd>

¹⁶⁷ Regulatory body for electronic media, Agenda of the 472nd extraordinary session, <https://link.crtars.rs/fe>

¹⁶⁸ CRTA's complaint against TV Pink was filed due to unilateral attacks on Miloš Jovanović. <https://link.crtars.rs/ff>

¹⁶⁹ In one such case, CRTA filed a complaint against TV Pink. <https://link.crtars.rs/fq>

¹⁷⁰ CRTA's complaint for showing the video with the described content is available at the link: <https://link.crtars.rs/fh>

¹⁷¹ CRTA reported to REM the showing of the Prime Minister's press conference in which she discredited the opposition. <https://link.crtars.rs/fi>

¹⁷² CRTA reported the case to REM. <https://link.crtars.rs/fj>

5.3. Election Campaign Oversight Committee

In the second reporting period, the Election Campaign Oversight Committee maintained its limited proactive role. The first session where citizens' complaints were considered was held on November 28th. It considered two complaints from citizens, one of which was adopted, and three proposals submitted by Oversight Committee's member Dr. Slobodan Prvanović regarding the appearances of the President of the Republic in the media, all of which were rejected as unfounded. In this period, another session was held, i.e. the fifth in a row, where four complaints from citizens and associations of citizens were discussed, while 17 other proposals were submitted by members of the Oversight Committee. Also, the Committee issued a statement calling on "*all holders of public authority who decide on the use of public premises to ensure equal access to all election participants under equal conditions.*"¹⁷³, which is the only activity of the Oversight Committee other than deciding on complaints.

¹⁷³ Available on the website of the National Assembly: <https://link.cрта.rs/k4>

6 REPORTS OF THE CRTA OBSERVATION MISSION ABOUT THE OBSERVED IRREGULARITIES

Based on the information collected by long-term observers in this period, CRTA submitted **67 complaints for various types of irregularities in the election process:**

40 complaints were submitted to the Anti-Corruption Agency due to cases of misuse of public resources and public functions and illegal activities of political parties.

22 complaints were submitted to the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media for cases of negative campaigns and official campaigns, and five applications were submitted to the Oversight Committee of the Assembly of Serbia for cases of running a negative campaign.

6.1 Complaints to the Anti-Corruption Agency:

- **Twenty-two complaints were filed against the Serbian Progressive Party for violating the Law on the Financing of Political Activities:**
 - Use of public resources for the purpose of party promotion - misuse of public resources (event of November 6th, Petrovac na Mlavi, opening of asphalted streets and announcement of new infrastructure works);
 - Using the website of the City of Vršac for the purpose of promoting the party and candidates on the list – abuse of public resources (text from November 4th, promotion of candidates on the website of the City of Vršac);
 - Use of the mayor’s social media profile for party promotion – misuse of public resources and promotion of humanitarian activities (post from November 6 on the Instagram profiles of the mayor of Čačak promoting the party’s humanitarian activities);
 - Organising humanitarian activities, distribution of free packages and radiological examinations – illegal activities of a political party (event in Niš on November 6th);
 - Organising humanitarian activities by distributing gifts to socially vulnerable citizens (event from November 13th in Bela Palanka);
 - Organising humanitarian activities in the form of free health check-ups in New Belgrade (photos about it published on the Facebook profile of the Serbian Progressive Party under the name “našblok282930” on November 18th);
 - Organising humanitarian activities in the form of free ophthalmological examinations (post on the Instagram account of the Serbian Progressive Party in Stari Grad on November 18th);
 - Organising a humanitarian activity in the form of a gift of white goods to a person suffering from multiple sclerosis in Ugrinovci (posted on Instagram by the account of the local board of the Serbian Progressive Party on November 17th);

- Organising humanitarian activities in the form of free distribution of firewood in Veliki Gradište (proclamation on the official Facebook page of Veliko Gradište on November 16th);
- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video about the reconstruction of the Health Centre in Veliki Gradište (published on November 30th on the Instagram page of the Serbian Progressive Party in Veliki Gradište);
- Using the official website of the municipality of Kula for the promotion of the political party Serbian Progressive Party (post about the visit of Goran Vesić and Dejan Tomašević to Kula, November 22nd);
- Using the Instagram account of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Siniša Mali for the promotion of the Serbian Progressive Party (posts refer to the period from December 1st – 2nd);
- Using public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video about the restoration of the promenade and grounds in Block 70 in New Belgrade (posted on the Instagram page of the Serbian Progressive Party's local committee Savski Kej New Belgrade, November 25th);
- Organising humanitarian activities in the form of distribution of packages with basic foodstuffs in Vranje (post on the Instagram page of the Serbian Progressive Party in Vranje, November 30th);
- Organising humanitarian activities in the form of distribution of packages to pensioners in Kučevo (post on the official Facebook account of the deputy mayor of the municipality, Nenad Mikić, December 5th);
- Using public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published with the logo of the Serbian Progressive Party about the achievements of the public authorities related to helping sick children and the elderly in Bela Palanka (posted on the Facebook page of the Serbian Progressive Party in Bela Palanka, November 30th);
- Using public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published in which the purchase of new medical devices and the reconstruction of kindergartens in the municipality of Babušnica are used for promotional purposes (posted on the SNS Babušnica Facebook page, December 8th);
- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published in which the projects of the city administration are presented for the promotional purposes of the Serbian Progressive Party (posted on the Facebook page of the city board of the Serbian Progressive Party in Bor, December 9th);
- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published in a health facility in the office of the ophthalmology department in Loznica, in which the reconstruction of the office is used to promote the Serbian Progressive Party (post on the Facebook page of the Serbian Progressive Party in Loznica, December 8th);
- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published in which the construction and reconstruction of the kindergarten in Petrovac na Mlavi is used to promote the Serbian Progressive Party (post on the Facebook page “Serbian Progressive Party Petrovac”, November 30th);

- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published about the improvement of health care in Topola, which was used for the purpose of promoting the Serbian Progressive Party (post on the “Serbian Progressive Party of Topola” Facebook page, December 5th);
 - Using public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – a promotional video was published about the improvement of the paediatric department in Krepuljin in order to promote the Serbian Progressive Party (posted on the Facebook page of the Serbian Progressive Party in Žagubica, December 8th).
- One complaint against the Party of Freedom and Justice for violating the Law on Financing of Political Activities:**
- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party (the promotional video of the Party of Freedom and Justice was recorded in the official premises of the Belgrade City Assembly and published on the social network “X” (Twitter) on the account of Vladimir Obradović, the holder of the electoral list Serbia against violence – Dobrica Veselinović – Prof. Dr. Vladimir Obradović” and a candidate for mayor of the City of Belgrade).
- Two complaints against the Socialist Party of Serbia for violating the Law on Financing of Political Activities:**
- Violation of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities in the Election Campaign – organising and financing activities of a humanitarian nature, possible illegal contribution to a political party by Ana Grozdanović and the possible existence of elements of a criminal offence from the Law on the Financing of Political Activities. (In the election campaign, Aleksandra Ana Grozdanović announced on her Instagram profile that she distributed coffee and chocolates to citizens, and she received money from an unknown person, and she did all this for the purpose of promoting the political party Socialist Party of Serbia and Ivica Dačić, the candidate and holder of the list.) IVICA DAČIĆ – PRIME MINISTER OF SERBIA”. The post was also reposted by the Instagram account “sps_vlasotince”);
 - Organisation of humanitarian activities in the form of providing free legal advice by a member of the Socialist Party of Serbia, lawyer Toma File, in the municipality of Savski venac (post on the Instagram page of the Socialist Party of Serbia from November 28th).
- One complaint against the Serbian People’s Party for violating the Law on Financing of Political Activities:**
- Organising a humanitarian activity in the form of giving away electricity generator to a multi-member family in Vladičin Han (post on the official Facebook account of the Serbian People’s Party on November 27th).
- Fourteen complaints due to misuse of public office and misuse of public campaign resources, i.e. violation of the Law on Prevention of Corruption:**

- Complaint against **Aleksandar Vučić, the President of the Republic of Serbia**, because at the pre-election rally in Pirot held on November 9th, he was announced as the President of the Republic, and during his speech he did not clearly state to the public whether he was presenting the position of the president or the position of a political party;
- Complaint against **Đorđe Radinović, the president of the Municipality of Stara Pazova**, because during a party activity – a tour of the market in Nova Pazova on November 12th, 2023, he publicly invited citizens to vote for the Serbian Progressive Party, acting as a public official;
- Complaint against **Darija Kisić Tepavčević, Minister for Family and Demography**, because during a party activity – a tour of the market in Nova Pazova on November 12th, 2023, she publicly invited citizens to vote for the Serbian Progressive Party, acting as a public official;
- Complaint against **Vladimir Obradović, a member of the Provisional Authority of the City of Belgrade**, for using public resources for the purpose of promoting the party (a promotional video of the Party of Freedom and Justice was recorded in the official premises of the Belgrade City Assembly and published on the “X” (Twitter) account of Vladimir Obradović, the holder of the electoral list Serbia against violence – Dobrica Veselinović – Prof. Dr. Vladimir Obradović” and candidate for mayor of the City of Belgrade);
- Complaint against **Goran Vesić, Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure** and a member of the Serbian Progressive Party political party, because on November 16th, 2023, from his official Instagram account, the Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure promoted the SNS political party and called on citizens to vote for the electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop” in the upcoming elections;
- Complaint against **Zlatko Marjanović, president of the Provisional Authority of the Despotovac municipality** and a member of the political party Serbian Progressive Party, because on November 10th, 2023, the official YouTube account of the municipality of Despotovac was used to promote the SNS political party, the public presentation of the electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”, and to invite voters to vote for the same list;
- Complaint against **Aleksandar Pajić, president of the Provisional Authority of the city of Šabac** and member of the political party Serbian Progressive Party, because he used the official Facebook account of the mayor of the city of Šabac, as well as gatherings in which he participated as an official, for the promotion of the SNS political party and for the public presentation of the declared electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”, as well as calling for citizens to vote for that political party and electoral list;
- Complaint against **Aleksandra Ćirić, president of the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Ruma** and a member of the political party Serbian Progressive Party for using the official Facebook account of the President of the Municipality of Ruma to promote the SNS political party and the proclaimed electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić - Serbia must not stop”;
- Complaint against **Vladan Vasić, president of the Provisional Authority of the city of Pirot** and a member of the Serbian Progressive Party, because in the period from November 9th to 18th he used the Instagram and Facebook

accounts of the city administration of the city of Pirot, as well as the gatherings in which he participated as an official for promotion the SNS political party and the proclaimed electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”.

- Complaint against **Goran Miljković, president of the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Bela Palanka** and member of the Serbian Progressive Party, because he used his position as mayor of the municipality and information about the beneficiaries of the “Help at Home” service to which he had access as the mayor of the municipality to distribute gifts to socially vulnerable persons together with other representatives of the political party of which he is also a member;
- Complaint against **Zlatko Marjanović, president of the Provisional Authority of the Despotovac municipality** and member of the Serbian Progressive Party, because he used his public addresses and meetings in which he participated as the president of the Provisional Authority, as well as the official Facebook profile of the municipal administration of the municipality of Despotovac and the official Facebook account of the president of the municipality for the promotion of the political party of the Serbian Progressive Party and the electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”, as well as for inviting voters to vote for that electoral list;
- Complaint against **Siniša Mali, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance** and a member of the Serbian Progressive Party political party, for using the official Facebook account of the Ministry of Finance and Instagram and TikTok accounts in which he identifies himself as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and on which he promotes the Serbian Progressive Party and the electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop” and invites voters to vote for it;
- Complaint against **Milun Todorović, the mayor of the city of Čačak** and a member of the Serbian Progressive Party, because he published a video on his Facebook account in which, as the mayor of Čačak, he received birthday gifts in the premises of the city administration of Čačak, and then on the same occasion he also received gifts in the premises of the Serbian Progressive Party, thereby abusing his position for the promotion of that political party;
- Complaint against **Damjan Miljanić, president of the municipality of Kula** and a member of the Serbian Progressive Party, for using the official website of the municipality of Kula to promote the Serbian Progressive Party and the announced electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”.

The Anti-Corruption Agency has so far decided on 15 out of a total of 40 complaints submitted. However, it issued 13 decisions because in one case three complaints were included in one decision. In seven cases, i.e. in five cases against the Serbian Progressive

Party¹⁷⁴, in one against the Socialist Party of Serbia¹⁷⁵ and in one against the Party of Freedom and Justice¹⁷⁶, the Agency determined that the complaints were founded and that there had been a violation of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities, and on that occasion warning measures were issued. However, in eight cases, the Agency determined that the complaints were unfounded, of which four related to the Law on Financing of Political Activities and four to the Law on Prevention of Corruption.

6.2 Complaints to the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media

In the current part of the election campaign, CRTA submitted twenty-two Complaints to REM: eight against TV Pink, three against TV B92, two against TV Prva and one against TV Happy, while one complaint covered over 30 local television stations.

Eight complaints were filed against Pink TV because of the following:

- Presentation of a short film within the “National News Programme” in which representatives of the opposition are accused of wanting to remove Aleksandar Vučić from the election process, which is illustrated by drawing a target on the head of the President of the Republic;
- Displaying content in which the opposition was attributed accountability for comments made by anonymous users on social networks against members of the Vučić family, which is why opposition representatives were compared to hyenas;
- Releasing of a propaganda video in which the president of the New DSS party Miloš Jovanović, is among other things, accused of freeing the “killer of Serbian children” in several editions of the “National News Programme”;
- Presentation of a report in which, due to the media’s critical coverage of Aleksandar Vučić’s rule, representatives of the opposition were discredited and accused without adequate factual basis of “timing the attack” on the president, without giving them the opportunity to state their statements;
- Relativisation of the genocide in Srebrenica in the election programme;
- Showing the nearly half-hour address of the Prime Minister in the National News Programme, who, leading the campaign from the position of a public official, accused the opposition of preparing chaos and disorder if they lose the elections, whereby TV Pink did not take steps to not broadcast such a campaign in its programme;
- President Vučić joining the central news programme live, in the part of the programme that is not marked as electoral, at the moment when he signed his support for the

¹⁷⁴ The cases that were conducted against the Serbian Progressive Party, in which the Agency imposed a warning measure, are as follows: the first case refers to the report against the SNS for the misuse of public resources for the promotion of the party on the official Instagram profile of the president of the Provisional Authority in Čačak, as well as for organising humanitarian activities in the form of distribution of packages to families; the second case refers to a report against SNS for organising humanitarian activities by the Health Council of SNS in Niš, the third case refers to a report against SNS for organising humanitarian activities, i.e. distributing gifts to socially vulnerable citizens in Bela Palanka; the fourth case refers to a report against SNS for organising humanitarian activities, i.e. giving away appliances to a person suffering from multiple sclerosis in Ugrinovci, and the fifth case refers to a report against SNS for organising humanitarian activities, i.e. for distributing firewood in Veliko Gradište.

¹⁷⁵ In the following case, the agency issued a warning measure to the Socialist Party of Serbia due to the application for organising humanitarian activities, i.e. distribution of chocolates and coffee to citizens by Ana Grozdanović.

¹⁷⁶ In the next case, the Agency issued a warning measure to the Freedom and Justice party for applying for the use of public resources for the purpose of promoting a political party because candidate Vladimir Obradović recorded a promotional video in the premises of the Belgrade City Assembly.

electoral list that bears his name. In a twenty-minute address, Vučić was allowed to conduct a negative campaign against the opposition and promote the electoral list of which he is the holder, while no other electoral list was given such treatment;

- Presentations in the election programme of the activities of Aleksandar Šapić as the president of the Provisional Authority of the City of Belgrade for the purpose of his electoral promotion as a candidate for mayor of Belgrade on the “Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade must not stop” list.

Three complaints were filed against Prva television because of the following:

- Covert presentation of the election in the form of an informational programme and failure to provide election participants with representation without discrimination. President Vučić was included live in the part of the Prva television news show that was not marked as electoral programme, at the moment when he signed his support for the electoral list that bears his name. In a ten-minute address, Vučić led a negative campaign against the opposition, and TV Prva did not take steps not to broadcast such a campaign in its programme;
- Covert presentation of the election in the form of an informational programme and enabling the conduct of a negative campaign against the election participants: Being a guest on the central news program “Vesti” in the capacity of the President of the Republic, the President, at the initiative of the host, promoted his own electoral list and led a negative campaign against other election participants, and the media service provider did not interrupt such an address;
- Violations of the prohibition that 30 days before the election, events organised on the occasion of the opening of infrastructure projects may not be reported if those events are attended by public officials who are candidates in the elections at the same time. In the election section of News, events related to various reconstructions were reported on several occasions, which were attended by Aleksandar Šapić as the president of the Provisional Authority of the City of Belgrade.

CRTA filed four complaints against TV B92 because of the following:

- Failure to provide election participants with representation without discrimination: Reporting on the collection of signatures of support for various electoral lists, B92 placed the list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop” in a privileged position, since only its representatives were allowed to address the viewers directly;
- Covert presentation of the election in the form of an informative programme. Enabling the President of the Republic to promote the electoral list of which he is the holder in his capacity as a public official;
- Violations of the prohibition that 30 days before the election, events organised on the occasion of the opening of infrastructure projects may not be reported if those events are attended by public officials who are candidates in the elections at the same time. In the election section of News, events related to various reconstructions were reported on several occasions, which were attended by Aleksandar Šapić as the president of the Provisional Authority of the City of Belgrade;
- Reports on the public meeting organised on the occasion of the opening of the Bank Poštanska Štedionica branch in Banja Koviljača, which was attended by a member of the Provisional Authority of the city of Loznica, who is also a candidate on the “Aleksandar Vučić – Loznica must not stop” list.

- **CRTA filed four complaints against TV Happy because of the following:**
- Covert presentation of the election in the form of an informational programme and enabling the conduct of a negative campaign against the election participants. In the exclusive guest appearance of the President of the Republic, on the occasion of his official visit to Paris, the President was enabled to promote the list of which he is the holder and to discredit the other participants in the election;
- Displaying a political ad message from the electoral list “Ivica Dačić – Prime Minister of Serbia” in which candidates from other electoral lists are attacked;
- Reports on the public meeting organised on the occasion of the opening of the Bank Poštanska Štedionica branch in Banja Koviljača, which was attended by a member of the Provisional Authority of the city of Loznica, who is also a candidate on the “Aleksandar Vučić – Loznica must not stop” list.

CRTA filed one complaint each against TV Studio B, TV Trstenik and TV Pančevo. These three television stations showed identical programmes in which Dragan Đilas, a candidate on the “Serbia Against Violence” electoral list, and Miloš Jovanović, a candidate on the “Dr. Miloš Jovanović – Hope for Serbia” list, were subjected to extremely negative criticism and disparagement.

A complaint was also filed **against thirty local television stations** that in whole or in part broadcast the rallies of the Serbian Progressive Party in Leskovac, Pirot, Smederevo and Belgrade, while they did not show the rallies of other election participants in a similar way and for a comparable duration.

REM did not act on any of CRTA’s complaints.

6.3. Complaints to the Election Campaign Oversight Committee

CRTA submitted five Complaints to the Oversight Committee:

- One complaint was filed against the political party of the Serbian Progressive Party and member of the party’s Presidency, Miloš Terzić, for running a negative campaign from the official account of the Serbian Progressive Party on social networks, against the election candidate Zdravko Ponoš, which violated the moral integrity of the election candidate;
- One complaint was filed against the political party Serbian Progressive Party and the media service provider TV Kraljevo for broadcasting a statement of this political party in which hate speech was used and which led a negative campaign against the announced electoral list “LOCAL FRONT – Predrag Voštinić”;
- One complaint was filed against the member of the Serbian Progressive Party, Mr. Vladimir Orlić, and the media service provider – Television Pomoravlje, for conducting a negative campaign against other election candidates;
- One complaint was filed against Mr. Vladimir Đukanović, a member of the Serbian Progressive Party and a candidate on the electoral list “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia must not stop”, for conducting a negative campaign in the media against representatives of the opposition.

- One complaint was filed against the Serbian Progressive Party due to the issuance of an official statement that led a negative campaign against representatives of the opposition.

The Election Campaign Oversight Committee has so far considered two complaints submitted by CRTA. Regarding the first complaint against Miloš Terzić and the Serbian Progressive Party, it concluded that in this case it was not a media in accordance with Article 37. of the Law on Public Information and Media, while for the second complaint against the Serbian Progressive Party and TV Kraljevo, it concluded that the statement, which is the subject of the complaint, refers to local elections, not parliamentary elections, and for that reason the Oversight Committee is not considered to be competent, but it did appeal for the said statement to be removed.

METHODOLOGY

As an independent domestic Observation Mission, CRTA monitors the entire election process of the snap parliamentary and Belgrade elections in 2023, according to international standards for non-partisan and impartial election observation: Declaration on Principles for International Election Observation,¹⁷⁷ Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, Declaration on Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation by Civil Organisations¹⁷⁸ and the Code of Conduct for Non-Party Observers.

The election observation methodology includes three periods: before the Election Day (long-term observation), the Election Day observation (short-term observation), and the third period after the Election Day until the announcement of the final election results (long-term observation). The observation methodology during each phase enables the CRTA Observation Mission to collect and process relevant information on a daily basis about the campaign that was conducted for the parliamentary elections, as well as the campaign for the election of councillors of the City Assembly of the City of Belgrade. The legal team of the CRTA Observation Mission monitors all sessions of the Republic Electoral Commission and the City Commission of the City of Belgrade, and collects information on the work of local electoral commission, which enables comprehensive insight into the organisation and implementation of elections, as well as procedural and legal procedures in the protection of electoral rights, procedures for repeating elections, and determining the final results.

Methodology of long-term monitoring of the election campaign

Since November 1st, 2023, the CRTA Observation Mission has been conducting systematic field observation of the election campaign, the work of the election administration, conducted media and social network monitoring, as well as a desk research of specific topics in the elections, in order to report to the public on the climate and main features of the campaign for the parliamentary and Belgrade elections scheduled for December 17th.

Field observation of elections

Since November 1st, 2023, a field team of long-term observers, trained to the highest standards, has been deployed to monitor the climate and flow of the election campaign from 168 cities and municipalities in Serbia on a daily basis, which provided CRTA with equal access to information on the flow and trends of the election process for the territory of the whole country. The method of data collection and verification provided the Observation Mission with a comprehensive insight into the events that marked the elections at all three levels, with an equal focus on monitoring the behaviour of the ruling parties, as well as non-parliamentary, i.e. opposition parties. The field observation included the monitoring of the activities of the public authorities, institutions, all public officials and holders of other public positions who were directly elected, both at the national, provincial and local levels. From the beginning of observation until November 20th, about 1,700 observer reports were received and processed.

¹⁷⁷ National Democratic Institute, "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers", October 27th, 2005, <https://link.crtars/6z>

¹⁷⁸ National Democratic Institute, "Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organisations and Code of Conduct for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observers and Monitors", April 3rd, 2012, <https://link.crtars/70>

Media monitoring

On November 1st, 2023, the CRTA Observation Mission began monitoring the work of television stations with national coverage. The goal was to provide insight into the presence of political pluralism in the media and the level of media professionalism in relation to all actors on the political scene. CRTA's observers, trained according to the highest international standards for media monitoring in the election process, watched all televisions with national coverage: RTS 1, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy and TV B92. The focus of the observation was the entire prime-time television programmes (extended "prime-time" from 17:30 to 24:00) in which political actors appeared or were mentioned.

The representation of political actors was measured by recording the basic unit of measurement – the seconds devoted to each political actor by each observed television. The tonality of political actors was determined on a three-level scale from negative to positive. A negative tonality reflects attacking or unfavourable coverage of a political actor, a neutral tonality a presentation of facts without attacking or affirmative reporting, while a positive tonality reflects affirmative and supportive coverage of a political actor. The seconds that political actors had in active and passive roles were measured. In the active role, the political actor is present in the video-tone address from the first person, while in the passive role, journalists, presenters, presenters or other programme participants talk about the political actor. You can read the detailed methodology of media monitoring on the CRTA website.¹⁷⁹

ABOUT THE CRTA OBSERVATION MISSION

CRTA is an independent, non-partisan civil society organisation dedicated to the development of democratic culture and civic activism. By creating public policy proposals, advocating the principles of accountable behaviour of authorities and state institutions, and educating citizens about their political rights, CRTA advocates for the establishment of the rule of law and the development of democratic dialogue.

Since 2016, CRTA has been observing elections at the national and local level. CRTA coordinates the work of the "Citizens on Watch" network, which includes several thousand citizens trained to monitor the regularity of voting. The continuous struggle to improve the conditions for fair and free elections is the backbone of all CRTA's activities.

CRTA observes the elections in accordance with international standards and rules of citizen observation. Since 2016, CRTA has followed all national (parliamentary and presidential) and Belgrade elections, as well as local elections in Zaječar and Pećinci in 2017 and in Lučani in 2018.

CRTA's findings and recommendations from previous election processes are complementary to the findings and recommendations of the international observer mission OSCE/ODHIR. Due to compliance with international standards for independent, civil election observation, CRTA

¹⁷⁹ CRTA, "Methodology of political pluralism media monitoring", <https://link.crtars/3c>

is a member of the European Network of Election Observation Organisations ([ENEMO](#)) as well as the Global Network of Election Observation Organisations ([GNDEM](#)).

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