

**BELGRADE**  
**ELECTIONS2024**



**CRTA:**

# **Second Interim Report Of Long Term Election Observation**

**May 13th - May 28th**

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# 1. Summary

In the second half of the campaign for the Belgrade City Assembly elections, there has been an increase in campaign activities, as well as a trend of local policy issues being overshadowed by national topics promoted by top government officials. Part of the public had hoped that the inter-party dialogue aimed at improving election conditions, which was happening alongside the campaign, would enhance the quality of the election environment for Belgrade's elections, but these expectations were unmet.

During the reporting period (May 13<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>), the inter-party dialogue on improving election conditions and implementing ODIHR recommendations was halted before achieving any significant results. A political agreement was reached to amend the Law on the Unified Voter's Register so that voters who changed their municipality of residence since July 2023 will need to cast their vote in their previous municipality (if local elections are held there on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Besides this, no substantial progress was made toward joint positions on potential legislative and public policy proposals for a better electoral process and fulfilling ODIHR recommendations.

The Parliamentary Working Group for Improving the Electoral Process was supposed to adopt a unified stance on proposed legal and bylaw amendments that could impact the June 2<sup>nd</sup> elections by May 20<sup>th</sup>. However, this did not happen due to the refusal of members from the ruling majority to discuss the proposed solutions.

The CRTA Observation Mission, whose observers are accredited to monitor the elections for the Belgrade City Assembly, assesses that the final phase of the campaign has been marked by chronic electoral issues: the blurring of lines between state and party, pressure on voters, and misuse of public resources for party campaigns.

The election campaign, dominated in terms of activities by the ruling party's list and supported by top state and city officials, resembles a national or presidential election rather than a race for city council seats. The main narrative of the campaign, promoted even before the elections were announced, frames the Belgrade elections as a matter of national survival and future. This perspective has been imposed by high-ranking state and city officials.

**The blurring of the line between the state and the party, as well as between local elections and a parallel national campaign** under the slogan "Serbia Tomorrow", with messages like "We are not a genocidal people" signed "Serbia and Srpska", **is evidenced by the fact that the same messages were conveyed at party rallies of the ruling party's list and through state activities.** By May 27<sup>th</sup>, the CRTA Observation Mission recorded over 300 campaign activities across

Belgrade where high-ranking public officials appeared 700 times. Their speeches predominantly emphasised messages framing the local elections in Belgrade as crucial for the nation. Although not a candidate, Aleksandar Vučić was the main face and brand of the campaign for the coalition gathered around the list “Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade Tomorrow”. In this capacity and as the President of Serbia, Vučić was the overwhelmingly dominant figure in the media space, addressing the public 55 times on major television networks over the 55-day campaign period, receiving twice as much airtime in prime news slots as all other electoral actors combined.

CRTA observers in Belgrade recorded **94 instances of public resource misuse**, including using institutional symbols in promotional spots, using vehicles and premises of public institutions, and involving public sector employees in party promotional activities.

**Over 70 individuals interviewed by the CRTA Observation Mission in Belgrade reported experiencing or witnessing voter pressure. These findings suggest that political pressures during the Belgrade election campaign have become normalised to the extent that both political actors and citizens view them as an integral part of the election season.** Witnesses described an atmosphere of fear, where citizens rarely report pressures due to a lack of trust in institutions to provide protection. Reports of pressure and fear came from **employees in public utility companies, municipal administrations, preschools, schools, gerontology centres, and disability associations.**

The CRTA Observation Mission documented a **concerning case of child exploitation in the campaign**, where a Belgrade preschool took children to a play that included political messages from the ruling party and its list. There are also alarming reports that parties in Belgrade **specifically targeted people from socially vulnerable groups and households with unpaid public utility bills.**

Election issues and city policy topics were side-lined in the most influential Serbian media, which

CRTA systematically monitored from **April 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Additionally, the most influential media outlets—RTS 1, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy, and TV B92—demonstrated a highly unequal treatment** of ruling and opposition representatives. Monitoring results show almost absolute dominance of ruling party representatives in prime news slots, with an average presence of 93%.

During the campaign, political party activists reported being subjected to physical and verbal attacks, with the highest number of incidents recorded in the second half of the campaign. Representatives of the ruling party list announced that their activists were attacked in New Belgrade by passers-by allegedly instructed by the opposition. The National Movement of Serbia reported an attack on activists in Stari Grad, a Green-Left Front activist was attacked by masked assailants in Zvezdara, and SNS activists threatened activists from the “I Choose the Fight” list

in Voždovac to drive them away from their stand. An incident also occurred at a press conference about removing river barges when Aleksandar Šapić snatched a phone from a citizen and threw it on the ground.

During this period, the City Election Commission adopted a decision to publish the total number of voters in Belgrade, which is **1,602,112**, down by 11,222 voters compared to the last Belgrade elections in December 2023.

**Concerns about the state of the Unified Voters' Register, which was finalised on May 17<sup>th</sup> for the June 2<sup>nd</sup> elections, resurfaced among the public.** Besides information provided by CRTA observers, **the Observation Mission received over 200 calls from citizens** from the start of the campaign until May 28<sup>th</sup>. Citizens often expressed **suspicion that unknown individuals were registered at their addresses**, and CRTA received information that **voting invitations were sent to unknown persons at some addresses**. Additionally, citizens reported receiving **notifications to vote for deceased individuals** and for those who **had deregistered from the address to which the invitation was sent**.

**Verification of the new legal provision, whereby citizens who changed their residence between municipalities after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 would vote at their old addresses (if local elections are held there on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024), was conducted under extremely limited conditions.** Factors limiting oversight of the implementation of this new provision by the Parliamentary Working Group included the lack of control over the criteria and methods used by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOI) in forming the list of voters who changed their residence between local government units after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, and the inability to search the Unified Voters' Register database by name, middle name, surname, and voter address.

Despite limited verification capabilities, CRTA, whose representatives as members of the Working Group monitored the law's implementation from the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (MPALS), **found that the list provided by the MOI did not include all voters who had changed their residence between local government units after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. Hence, this provision was not fully and faithfully implemented.**

**The Belgrade City Electoral Commission worked in accordance with the law and legal deadlines during this reporting period.** The Commission maintained the same level of transparency as in the first month and a half of the election campaign, which was improved over last year's election process by introducing live video streaming of sessions. **Most decisions were adopted unanimously.** The Commission also ruled on two complaints – one was dismissed, and the other was rejected.

A total of 14 electoral lists are running in these elections. To qualify, each list needed to submit at least 3,000 certified voter support statements, with the total number of submitted support signatures exceeding 59,000. **The lists predominantly certified these signatures in municipal administrations—only 22% were certified by public notaries.**

The nomination process, concluded on May 12<sup>th</sup>, was again marked by **reports of obstructions in collecting support signatures for candidacies, as several opposition candidates reported the**

**unavailability of certifiers.** There were also **allegations of at least one falsified voter support statement, noted in the electoral list of the Greek national minority “Belgrade Our City”.** **Suspicious also arose regarding the rapid collection and certification of missing voter support statements for the “We – the Voice of the People” list.**

The action of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption has been notably slower than in previous election cycles, despite legal provisions requiring action on complaints within short deadlines of five days. CRTA noted that the actors involved in these complaints were late in sending responses to the Agency, preventing it from acting effectively within the deadlines. **The Agency’s first actions were recorded only in the campaign’s final weeks,** despite CRTA’s complaints being filed in mid-April.

**The CRTA Observation Mission filed 46 complaints with oversight and regulatory bodies, most of them during this reporting period.** CRTA submitted 31 complaints to the Anti-Corruption Agency and 15 to the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM).

Complaints submitted to REM against media that neglect and violate legal obligations - e.g. promoting aggressive rhetoric, hate speech and using artificial intelligence against political opponents – were not even published on the institution’s official website. Only in the campaign’s final week, **did the REM announce that it had initiated its first procedure** following a complaint from the CRTA Observation Mission about the use of deep fake technology to simulate a statement by the leader of the electoral list “Dr Savo Manojlović – I, too, am Belgrade – Go-Change” on TV Pink.

**A positive step in regulating media coverage during elections is that, for the first time since 2020, commercial television stations are now included under the Rulebook** on Media Service Providers’ Obligations During Election Campaigns, which **came into effect on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024.** However, by the end of this reporting period, **REM had not enforced the new obligations imposed by the Rulebook.** CRTA’s observation mission recorded political ads during the main news broadcasts on TV Pink, TV Happy, and TV B92, despite the Rulebook stating that “political advertising is not allowed during the central news programmes”.

Up to this point, CRTA's observation mission has held meetings with the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, and the Ombudsman. The REM responded to CRTA’s invitation for a meeting only at the end of the campaign, suggesting June 1<sup>st</sup> as the meeting date. The Higher Court in Belgrade informed CRTA that it could not organise a meeting as it had already begun deliberating certain cases related to the electoral process. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Working Group for Supporting the Improvement of the Electoral Process in Serbia did not respond to CRTA's official invitation for a meeting.



## 2. Political context

Since the very beginning, the Belgrade election race has been marked by the paradox that local issues are entirely in the shadow of national issues, opened on the stage of the “alleged geopolitical drama”, as well as by the unclear impression of whether parties and other political organisations are competing for council mandates or whether there is a struggle waged between the state, on the one hand, and its opponents, and even enemies, on the other.

The catchphrase about “non-genocidal people”, which was omnipresent, from the projection on the façade of the tallest skyscraper in Belgrade, to the accounts of the highest state officials and functionaries of the Serbian Progressive Party on social networks, was a timely response to the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on May 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>1</sup> In the days leading up to the vote in the UN, the main topic of the Serbian public was the fight of the President of Serbia against the adoption of the Resolution, whose goal, as it was incorrectly explained in a chorus, was to stamp the mark of collective guilt on the Serbian people and, as inconceivable as it may sound, “genocidal” character.<sup>2</sup>

The big pre-election national story was constructed as a myth of victory despite the fact that the Resolution on the Srebrenica genocide was passed despite all the President’s efforts and sacrifices. The proof of Serbia’s triumph, which was spread through most of the domestic media in the same minute, was found in the total number of states that abstained or voted against the East River, which was greater than the number of those that voted for the resolution.<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the media’s victorious unity, a river of citizens (and vehicles) poured into the streets of Belgrade, which was supposed to create the impression of a spontaneous mass demonstration of gratitude to the President of Serbia and a national celebration<sup>4</sup> which was completely bizarre considering the reason that is directly related to the trauma of war crimes. Many of the very well-organised demonstrators were draped in the Serbian flag, following the example of the President who sat draped in that manner at the UN General Assembly session. And the entire state leadership was symbolically “decorated” in the same way while collectively watching the transmission from New York.<sup>5</sup>

In the video clips shared by the highest state and party officials, the signature of the message “We are not a genocidal nation” read Proud Serbia and Srpska, which is another illustration of the spirit of the campaign in which the “Serbian world”, in its physical and metaphysical breadth, was more important than narrowly local, communal issues that should be dealt with by city

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<sup>1</sup> BBC in Serbian, “Genocide in Srebrenica: The UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution on the Day of Remembrance”, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/ol>

<sup>2</sup> Tanjug, Vučić: “The resolution will put a mark on the foreheads of the victims; The Germans told us to face the resolution as they give it to us”, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/om>

<sup>3</sup> Večernje novosti, “WE SUCCEEDED IN PROVIDING AN ADMIRABLE RESISTANCE”: Vučević said – The resolution was formally adopted, but fundamentally it experienced a debacle”, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/on>

<sup>4</sup> Blic, THE SERBIAN FLAG IS FLYING Citizens took to the streets after the vote on the Resolution on Srebrenica, crowds in the centre of Belgrade (VIDEO, PHOTO), May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/oo>

<sup>5</sup> NIN, Wrapped in Serbian flags: Vučić at the UN General Assembly, ministers at Andrićev venac, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/op>

authorities. Republika Srpska, as an entity in a neighbouring country, was more visible than, say, the sewage problem in Belgrade's settlements on the left bank of the Danube.

The dominance of strategic national topics and global politics during the campaign period for local elections was significantly fuelled by the visit of Xi Jinping, the President of China, to Serbia, i.e. Belgrade. Chinese flags were the most striking feature in the image of the city, which would have been, in some other circumstances, visually marked by competing pre-election messages. Enormous media importance was given to the event, which was, as reported by Serbian Radio and Television, an opportunity to "cement the iron friendship" of the two countries.<sup>6</sup> A curious and illustrative fact is that the aforementioned public media service on its first TV channel even interrupted the broadcast of the semi-final night of the Eurovision Song Contest in order to broadcast live to the viewers the arrival of the Chinese delegation at the Belgrade airport.

The fact is, however, that the fight for Belgrade is a fight for something much bigger than one, even the largest unit of local self-government. In the political reality of Serbia, Belgrade is a stake whose size is hard to overestimate. About a quarter of the country's population lives in the capital. About 40 percent of the gross national product is created there. Unlike most of Serbia, where the dominance of the Serbian Progressive Party cannot be questioned for many years, there is competition in the political market in Belgrade. In the previous two election cycles, the opposition was close to "conquering" Belgrade.

Invited by the Government of Serbia<sup>7</sup> ODIHR decided for the first time to send a mission to observe local elections in Belgrade, which is the first international mission sent to observe local elections in Serbia after 2002. The opposition conditioned the participation in the repeated elections in Belgrade by significantly improving the election conditions compared to those in December.

Immediately before the announcement of the Belgrade elections, following the encouragement of international actors, the government called for a political dialogue on the adoption of ODIHR recommendations. The dialogue initiated by the then Prime Minister, the current Speaker of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, brought together representatives of the ruling and opposition parliamentary groups, while civil society was subsequently invited. From the beginning, that process was accompanied by serious doubts about the intentions with which it was initiated, as well as the possibility of achieving a significant effect due to the fact that the dialogue was established only two days before the announcement of elections for the new government in Belgrade. Representatives of the ruling majority blocked the functioning of the working groups, which were formed as a result of a fragile political agreement, by refusing to decide on concrete solutions that were mainly proposed by civil sector organisations.

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<sup>6</sup> RTS, Xi Jinping arrives in Serbia on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 29 April 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/ot>

<sup>7</sup> ODIHR, Local Elections, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/ou>

At the first meeting in the Assembly at the beginning of April, the bloc of opposition parties presented three minimum conditions for participation in the elections – the establishment of a commission for revising the Voters' Register, a more equal representation of political actors on the public media service and the unification of the Belgrade and remaining local elections in one day. While no agreement was reached on the first two conditions, on April 18<sup>th</sup>, the government accepted the last request for the simultaneous holding of local elections on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. The government agreed to induce the early dissolution of 87 municipal and city assemblies, although it previously claimed that such decisions were illegal. It is important to remind that in 2023, early local elections were called in the same way in 65 local self-government units.

Some opposition parties saw the merger of the June 2<sup>nd</sup> elections as their own success in the negotiations. The other part of the opposition bloc expected more fundamental changes, primarily through the adoption of a special law that would move all elections to the autumn, which would leave time for a significant improvement in election conditions. That part of the opposition decided to boycott the elections. Disagreement regarding the assessment of the scope of the demands and the outcome of the negotiations led to a division and even to severe public confrontations in the opposition bloc, which for the most part participated in the 2023 elections in the pro-European coalition Serbia Against Violence. The fact that not all local elections are being boycotted, but only those in Belgrade, contributed to the confusion that arose in the public regarding the disturbed relations between the former coalition partners.

Apart from the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, the political context in which the campaign for local elections took place was also marked by the question of Kosovo's admission to the Council of Europe, tensions in the north of Kosovo related to the intrusion of the Kosovo police into branches of the Postanska Štedionica from Belgrade and the parliamentary elections in Croatia.

### 3. Election framework and conditions

Elections for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly were announced on the last day of the legal deadline – April 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was determined that the campaign will last a maximum of 60 days so that the elections will be held on June 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Elections for councillors of the City Assembly are organised on the territory of the City of Belgrade as one electoral unit. Elections are organised every four years, while the current election process is a consequence of the failure to form a city government after the extraordinary Belgrade elections in December 2023. **A total of 110 council mandates will be distributed by the system of the highest quotient between electoral lists that exceed the three-percent electoral threshold. This threshold does not apply to lists of national minorities.** The mayor of Belgrade is not elected by citizens in direct elections, but the City Assembly elects the holder of this office.

The electoral process takes place on the basis of a set of laws that govern electoral matters: Law on Local Elections (2022), Law on Election of Members of Parliament (2022), Law on Unified Voters' Register (2011), Law on Prevention of Corruption (2019), Law on Financing of Political Activities (2022), Law on Electronic Media (2023), etc. In accordance with these laws, competent institutions – such as the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, the Regulatory Body of Electronic Media<sup>8</sup> etc. – act and adopt a series of by-laws that prescribe the election rules in detail.

#### 3.1. The process of negotiations regarding the improvement of election conditions

At the time of calling the elections, in contrast to the solid legislative framework, there are numerous unfulfilled or insufficiently fulfilled ODIHR recommendations from previous elections,<sup>9</sup> as well as the findings and recommendations of domestic observers, including those related to the Belgrade elections held only three months earlier, which challenged the legality and

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<sup>8</sup> REM was obliged by the Law on Electronic Media, which entered into force on November 4, 2023, to harmonize the secondary legislation with the new law by May 7, 2024 at the latest. A few days after the announcement of elections for councillors in the Belgrade City Assembly, REM started a public debate on draft regulations, the adoption of which falls under its jurisdiction. This discussion lasted from April 5 to 25, 2024. In twenty days, which is the shortest period prescribed by law for conducting a public hearing, the REM covered the discussion of as many as fifteen different documents, including the Rulebook on the manner of performing the obligations of media service providers during the election campaign. By consolidating the public discussion, REM questioned the expediency of the process of proposing solutions that would improve the proposed texts. A group of 15 media associations and civil society organisations dealing with media freedom appealed to the REM to extend the public discussion, precisely in order to get enough time to familiarize themselves with the drafts of all regulations as well as to make written comments and suggestions on each of them. REM refused, referring to the latest deadline for the adoption of the rulebook provided by law. Rulebook of

<sup>9</sup> ODIHR made 145 recommendations to the State of Serbia in the period from the 2012 election to the 2022 election, that is, after the five republican election cycles observed by ODIHR in this ten-year period. After the elections held in December 2023, ODIHR began a regular evaluation of the fulfillment of recommendations and determined that only five priority and 13 other recommendations were fully fulfilled. Also, ODIHR published the Final Report on the extraordinary parliamentary elections held on December 17, sending 25 more recommendations to the State of Serbia, of which these seven priority ones were paraphrased back in 2012: <https://link.crija.rs/ng>

legitimacy of the results.<sup>10</sup> With the start of the inter-party dialogue in the parliament on April 1<sup>st</sup>,<sup>11</sup> and on the initiative of the Speaker of the National Assembly, **for the first time after the December elections, the conditions for the establishment of a socio-political dialogue on the quality of the elections were achieved, although only in parallel with the holding of the Belgrade elections scheduled for June 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

**In this reporting period, the inter-party dialogue on the improvement of electoral conditions and the fulfilment of ODIHR recommendations was stopped and did not result in substantial progress. After seven meetings of the Parliamentary Collegium and seven meetings of the Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process, which resulted from the agreement at the Collegium, were held from April 1,<sup>12</sup> not even minimal steps have been taken in the direction of taking common positions on possible legal proposals and public policy proposals to improve the electoral process.**

Substantial contributions for specific work and at the meetings of the Collegium, and especially at the meetings of the Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process (Working Group), were predominantly provided by civil society.<sup>13</sup> Some proposals came from certain opposition parliamentary groups and minority parties, while there were no proposals from representatives of the ruling majority on how to improve election conditions and respond to ODIHR recommendations.

Although the Working Group, made up of representatives of parliamentary groups, parliamentary minority parties and three civil society organisations, Transparency Serbia, CeSID and CRTA, was supposed to **deliver the first task by May 20<sup>th</sup> by adopting a common position on proposals for legal changes that could have effects on the elections June 2<sup>nd</sup>,**<sup>14</sup> this did not happen due to the obstruction of members from the ranks of the ruling majority to express their views on the proposals.

Chronologically, during the first meeting of the Working Group, which was held on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, it was agreed that the members should submit their contributions by May 7<sup>th</sup> for the purposes of defining priority amendments to the law that the Working Group would consider and agree upon during the first three weeks of its work (until May 20<sup>th</sup>), in order to submit the agreed priorities to the Committee on Constitutional and Legislative Issues. After the discussion of the submitted proposals, starting on May 7<sup>th</sup>, when the second meeting of the Working Group began, which was then interrupted and continued on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, as well as the great effort

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<sup>10</sup> CRTA observation mission, *Final report on the extraordinary parliamentary and Belgrade elections held on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024*, <https://link.crtars.rs/mo>

<sup>11</sup> The Collegium of the National Assembly convened on March 26<sup>th</sup> for April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crtars.rs/mn>

<sup>12</sup> It was only at the end of April that an agreement was reached on the formation of a Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process within the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Legislative Issues.

<sup>13</sup> Crta submitted to the National Assembly: April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024, **Written contribution in the implementation process of ODIHR recommendations**, <https://link.crtars.rs/pd>; On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Proposals on how to further work on the implementation of ODIHR recommendations, <https://link.crtars.rs/pp> and on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Contribution to the work of the Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process, <https://link.crtars.rs/pz>

<sup>14</sup> National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Information on the work of the Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process in the Period April 29<sup>th</sup> – May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Composition and Tasks of the Working Group, <https://link.crtars.rs/q8>

of the members, primarily from the ranks of civil society, invested in proposing measures that, if adopted and applied, could at least partially bring Serbia closer to the standards of fair and free elections – **the members of the Working Group did not reach the decision.**

The declaration of members of the Working Group on priority legal changes was first scheduled for May 13<sup>th</sup>, but the representatives of the ruling majority **postponed it with the request that the proposals be systematised and shaped into an appropriate format for voting.** The session was postponed until the next day, May 14<sup>th</sup>, while in the meantime the proponents, i.e. civil society, the chairman of the Working Group and the parliamentary service worked until the early hours of the morning on the preparation of the agenda for the vote. **A total of 25 proposals were converted into more than 30 agenda items.**<sup>15</sup> When the session was resumed, the representative of the ruling coalition **again asked for a postponement of the vote, explaining that he and his colleagues from the parliamentary majority needed time to carefully analyse all the proposals so that they could then make a statement about them.** The representatives of the ruling majority did not say how much time was needed. Even after the new meeting scheduled for May 17<sup>th</sup>, the vote did not succeed because **the representatives of the ruling majority did not appear,** nor did they respond to the letter of the Chairman of the Working Group on whether they would be ready to vote by May 20<sup>th</sup>. Due to such circumstances, there was no new attempt to continue the work.

**Due to the obstruction of the work of the Working Group, elaborated proposals for concrete solutions for various priority election areas indicated by ODIHR and domestic election observers have returned to the drawer – including the proposal for a mechanism for the revision and verification of the Unified Voters' Register, criminal acts in elections and pressure on voters, the media, etc.**

### 3.2. Supervision over the implementation of the amendment to the Law on the Unified Voters' Register

The only concrete result of the inter-party dialogue on the improvement of electoral conditions is the political agreement with the Collegium of the National Assembly on May 9<sup>th</sup> regarding the amendment of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register with the aim of alleviating to some extent doubts about voter migration. The agreement reached does not refer to the fulfilment of ODIHR recommendations and was not considered and prepared within the Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process. On May 10<sup>th</sup>, the National Assembly voted with 153 votes "in favour" of the amendment to the Law on the Unified Voters' Register, which provides that citizens who have changed their place of residence in the past 11 months will not be able to vote at their new address, but at the one they were at on July 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2023.<sup>16</sup> This restriction

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<sup>15</sup> National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Information on the work of the Working Group for improving the electoral process in the period April 29<sup>th</sup> – May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Composition and tasks of the Working Group, <https://link.crija.rs/gb>

<sup>16</sup> Independent articles of the Law on Amendments to the Law on the Unified Voters' Register ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 44/2024) Article 2: A voter who is registered in the Voters' Register and who, after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, registered his place of residence in a local self-government unit, i.e. in a city municipality where local elections were announced for June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, will be registered in the part

applies only to those citizens who, in the period between July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 and June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, registered their residence in one of the municipalities for which local elections have been announced for June 2<sup>nd</sup>. According to the newly adopted provision, citizens who meet these conditions will be returned to the address of their residence on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, within the framework of the Unified Voters' Register. This practically means that those citizens will be able to exercise their right to vote on June 2<sup>nd</sup> at the polling station belonging to their previous address if that address is in the municipality where local elections are held.

The implementation of this provision of the Law is entrusted to the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government (MDULS), as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP). The procedure for implementing the provision is planned according to the following steps: 1) The MUP, based on an inspection of citizens' residence registers, submits a list of citizens who meet the criteria of the new provision of the Law (in the period between July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 and June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, they registered their residence in the territory of one of the municipalities in which the June 2<sup>nd</sup> local elections) to the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government; 2) On the basis of that list, the MDULS sends letters to the Voters' Register clerks at the local self-governments, who then draw up a decision on the change of address in the Unified Voters' Register for the citizens from the list. Based on these decisions, the position of those citizens in the Voters' Register is changed so that for the local elections in 2024, they will be at the addresses where they were on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

By amending the Decision on the formation of the Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process dated May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the members and deputy members of the Working Group were given the right to supervise the implementation of independent Article 2 of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register. The control was organised after the conclusion of the Voters' Register on May 17<sup>th</sup> in several appointments at the premises of the MDULS in Belgrade, under pre-defined conditions. The CRTA representatives were present at each of the available appointments and approached the control with an independently prepared methodology.

**After reviewing the conditions for the supervision implementation, the CRTA team concluded that the members of the Working Group have a significantly limited ability to carry out essential and comprehensive control over the implementation of independent Article 2 of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register.** The key factors that limited the supervision of the implementation of the law are:

1. lack of control over the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on voters who changed their place of residence between local self-government units after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, as well as
2. disabled search of the database of the Unified Voters' Register by first name, middle name, last name and address of the voter.

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of the Voters' Register according to the place residence he had on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. The provision of paragraph 1 of this article does not apply to voters who are candidates for councillors on election lists that were submitted in the local elections scheduled for June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, before the entry into force of this law.

The working group for control is only allowed to check the work of the Unified Voters' Register clerks, i.e. verify whether the clerks correctly made the decisions by which they transferred the voters from the MUP list to the addresses they had before July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

**The control process was carried out under extremely restrictive conditions**, without the possibility of members of the working group to carry out wider checks except a) checking whether the voters from the list provided by the MUP were transferred to the address indicated on the list, and b) checking whether certain voters, stated by members of the working group, appear or not on the list submitted by the MUP. **These conditions were not in accordance with the agreement reached at the Collegium in the National Assembly held on May 9<sup>th</sup>, where it was agreed that the voter search would be done by first name, middle name, last name and address of the voter.**

Members of the Working Group were unable to check the status of other voters in the Unified Voters' Register, nor the addresses where voters from the list provided by the MUP were registered in the last 11 months, as well as on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. According to the MDULS, the verification of voters in the UNIFIED VOTERS' REGISTER is only possible by entering the voter's registration number in the UNIFIED VOTERS' REGISTER system, while the Crte team insisted on enabling a search by name and address of the voter, as previously agreed. Doubts about the openness of the control process are further deepened by the fact that the Manual for the Implementation of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register states that the Unified Voters' Register search "can be performed according to all criteria that are grouped in an intuitive way: unique master citizen number, first name, last name, name of one parent, date of birth, place of residence."<sup>17</sup>

In these circumstances, the CRTA team started the control, which was based on checking two groups of voters: 1) 22 voters for whom CRTA has reliable data that they changed their place of residence in the previous 11 months, and 2) 78 voters who appear as voters for the first time in the Republic of Serbia in the period after the elections in April 2022 until the elections in December 2023. Out of these 100 voters, 98 correspond to the profile of migrated voters from December 2023 (whose residence is registered in uninhabitable locations in Belgrade, who were registered to vote simultaneously in Belgrade and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and who do not appear in the Voters' Register before 2023).

The check revealed that out of these 100 voters, only 23 were found on the list submitted by the MUP to the MDULS. **For these 23 voters, resolutions were drawn up by the MDULS clerks and their address in the Voters' Register was changed. For 74 persons, it was not possible to determine where they are in the Voters' Register** (because it was not possible to search by

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<sup>17</sup> Page 87, Manual for the Implementation of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register (2019), Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, <https://link.crtars/ge>



name, surname, middle name or address), and it was unequivocally established that they were not on the list submitted by the MUP.

Despite the limited possibility of checking the database of the Unified Voters' Register, **CRTA determined that the Ministry of Internal Affairs' list does not contain all voters who changed their residence across local self-government units after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.** By checking the names of voters for whom CRTA has reliable knowledge that they registered their residence at the same address in a Belgrade municipality in the period October-November 2023, members of the CRTA control team came to the following findings: a) out of 22 names, 10 are located at the list provided by the MUP, and they were transferred to addresses in Kragujevac, Aranđelovac and Zaječar, b) 12 names are not on the list provided by the MUP.

Through further verification, CRTA tried to determine the status of 52 voters who, in the period from April 2022 to December 2023, appear for the first time in the Voters' Register in the Republic of Serbia, and who registered their residence at the address of an unfinished and uninhabitable residential building in one Belgrade municipality. **None of these names is on the list provided by the MUP.** Most of these voters, in addition to being in the Voters' Register for the city elections in Belgrade in 2023, were registered to vote in the parliamentary elections in 2023 on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This additional check deepened the suspicion that all those citizens who established their residence on the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the first time between July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 and June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 were exempted from the application of the newly adopted legal provision – which is the case with a large number of citizens from the surrounding countries receiving citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, with an identity card along with citizenship. If this is the case, then all citizens who acquired the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia and established their residence on its territory in the last year are in the Voters' Register at their last known addresses.<sup>18</sup>

**Although the MUP made decisions and changed the addresses of voters from the list compiled by the MUP, it was determined that the list of the MUP does not include all voters who changed their residence in the last 11 months, nor was it possible to determine whether the addresses listed in the list of the MUP and to which the citizens should be returned actually correct.** Finally, the CRTA control team, as part of the Working Group for monitoring the implementation of independent Article 2 of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register, **determined that the implementation of this provision was not implemented completely and in good faith.**

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<sup>18</sup> According to the latest available official data, in 2022 as many as 22,879 citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina received the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia. If for the purpose of assessment for the period from July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 to June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, we take the average number of RS citizenships issued to citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last 10 years, it can be assumed that there are potentially up to 16,000 new voters in the Voters' Register, to whom Independent Article 2 of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register does not apply.

### 3.3. Field controls of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Even in this period, **it was not possible to obtain information on whether and to what extent the Ministry of Internal Affairs carried out field checks of residences** in cases where, during a new registration of residence, electronic control determined that more than five persons had already been registered at the given addresses. The monitoring start date was March 27<sup>th</sup>, as the Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the public.<sup>19</sup> Field controls have been started because, according to the available information, it is a measure proposed by the Working Group of the Government of Serbia for the improvement of election conditions. As stated in the announcement, the proposal was made “in cooperation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)”.

**On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, CRTA sent a request for free access to information of public importance to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in which it requested information on the number of conducted field controls.** On April 18<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Internal Affairs demanded from CRTA to specify the request – whether information is requested for all municipalities in Serbia or only for the city of Belgrade. CRTA stated in the letter that the requested information refers to the territory of the entire country, after which the Ministry requested on April 25<sup>th</sup>, **an extension of the deadline by 40 days.** Taking into account the comprehensiveness of the request and the inability of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to share the requested information in a short period of time, CRTA sent **a new request** on April 26<sup>th</sup>, in which the said information is requested only for the city of Belgrade. However, in that case as well, the Ministry **extension of the deadline by 40 days.** The Ministry of Internal Affairs has not submitted the requested information by the date of the conclusion of this report, although the deadline for submitting the response expired on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

### 3.4. Disputed amendment of the Instructions for the implementation of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, far from the public eye, without announcement or promotion, issued an instruction amending the Instruction for the Implementation of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register, which enabled voters to vote according to their place of residence in local elections as well, if it is on the territory of the same city or municipality where the elections are held.

This change made it possible, for example, for a citizen whose residence is in the city municipality of Grocka, to vote for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly, for example, in the municipality Stari Grad, if he registered his residence there. Citizens of Belgrade, who register to vote by temporary residence, could, according to that decision, vote for councillors of the City Assembly from any municipality, regardless of their permanent residence. However, for the

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<sup>19</sup> The announcement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is available at: <https://link.crt.rs/mp>

elections for councillors of the city municipality, they would have to vote exclusively on the territory of the municipality where they reside.

This change, introduced without any explanation and without communication to the public about the change it implies, only contributed to the confusion and called into question the intentions of the MDULS, since it was not at all the subject of the parliamentary dialogue on the implementation of the ODIHR recommendations. Observed in the light of the fact of electoral engineering from December 2023, this change made it significantly more difficult to detect manipulative voter migrations.

CRTA alerted the public about these findings, informed the ODIHR newly established mission to observe local elections in Serbia, and called on the MDULS to withdraw this change. After 20 days that this amendment was in effect, the MDULS issued a new instruction on the amendment of the Instructions for the Implementation of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register, which deleted this provision.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that the decision was in force for only 20 days, the CRTA Observation Mission followed the work of the City Electoral Commission in this reporting period, and after the conclusion of the Voters' Register on May 17<sup>th</sup>, it received information that 327 voters from Belgrade exercised their right and registered for voting for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly based on their temporary residence in another city municipality. Consequently, the Voters' Registers for the city level and individual municipalities are currently not identical. Voters from 13 Belgrade municipalities (Barajevo, Lazarevac, Sopot, Obrenovac, Surčin, Palilula, Grocka, Savski Venac, Stari Grad, Vračar, Rakovica, Čukarica and Novi Beograd) used this right. Voters from the municipality of Novi Beograd did it to the greatest extent, as many as 98. Interestingly, all 327 voters by temporary residence registered to vote in only three Belgrade municipalities: Zemun, Voždovac and Zvezdara. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 177 more voters will be able to vote for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly at polling stations in Zemun, 128 voters at polling stations in Voždovac and 22 voters at polling stations in Zvezdara.

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<sup>20</sup> Instruction on amending and supplementing the Instruction for the Implementation of the Law on the Unified Voters' Register, Minister Jelena Žarić Kovačević, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Table 1. The difference in the number of voters in the Voters' Register for city and municipal elections on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, by municipality

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Zemun	169,239	169,062	177
Voždovac	162.131	162.003	128
Zvezdara	162.249	162.227	22
Mladenovac	44,915	44,915	0
Barajevo	23,561	23,564	-3
Lazarevac	49,789	49,793	-4
Sopot	17.261	17,265	-4
Obrenovac	64,014	64,019	-5
Surčin	39,822	39,832	-10
Palilula	173.247	173.262	-15
Grocka	72,893	72,912	-19
Savski Venac	39,968	39,989	-21
Stari Grad	53,480	53,504	-24
Vračar	62,716	62,749	-33
Rakovica	99,321	99,362	-41
Čukarica	163,934	163,984	-50
Novi Beograd	203.572	203,670	-98
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.602.112</b>	<b>1.602.112</b>	<b>0</b>

## 4. Proceedings of the City election administration

The City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade (CEC) worked in accordance with the law and legal deadlines in this reporting period as well. CEC maintained the same level of transparency as during the first month and a half of the election campaign, which was improved compared to last year's election process by the introduction of video transmission of sessions.<sup>21</sup> Most of the decisions were adopted unanimously. The Commission also decided on two objections – one was dismissed, while the other was rejected. During the candidacy phase, allegations of at least one falsified declaration of voter support for the electoral list *Belgrade our city* appeared again. Doubts were also raised regarding the completion of the missing declarations of voter support for the electoral list *We – the Voice of the People*, since such declarations were collected in a very short period of time.

Since the announcement of the election, the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade (CEC) has held 18 sessions, eight of which pertain to this reporting period of the CRTA Observation Mission (May 13<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>). Starting from the second session, the CRTA Observation Mission is also present at each session according to the obtained accreditation for observing the work of electoral bodies in this election process. The Belgrade elections are also observed by ODIHR, which is the first time that this international mission is engaged in observing some local elections in Serbia after 2002. In addition to the CRTA Observation Mission, the organisations Centre for Free Elections and Democracy (Cesid), Go-Change and Citizens on Watch were accredited as domestic observers to observe the elections in Belgrade. When it comes to foreign observers, in addition to ODIHR, the embassies of the following countries are also accredited: Slovakia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United States of America, as well as the following international organisations: Delegations of the EU in Serbia, IREX and IFES. Deadlines for accreditation expired on May 25<sup>th</sup>.

The deadline for submitting candidacies expired on May 12<sup>th</sup> at midnight. All lists that have submitted their candidacies have been announced. **On May 17<sup>th</sup>, CEC adopted a consolidated electoral list so that a total of 14 proclaimed electoral lists will appear on the ballot on June 2<sup>nd</sup> in the order of their proclamation.**<sup>22</sup> Considering the number of candidates, the voting process at the polling stations can be controlled by over 43,000 members of the polling station committees, of which almost 7,600 are permanent members<sup>23</sup> and a possible 35,420 members of the extended composition.<sup>24</sup>

At its 16<sup>th</sup> session, CEC also adopted the Decision on publishing the total number of voters in the City of Belgrade, which is **1,602,112**.<sup>25</sup> Deputy member of CEC in front of the Democratic Party, Zoran Alimpić, demanded from the Commission to request from the MDULS a notification about how many voters were deleted from the Voters' Register based on the new Law on

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<sup>21</sup> Which can be followed at: <https://link.crtars.org>

<sup>22</sup> CEC, Summary election list, <https://link.crtars/rc>

<sup>23</sup> Three members, one of whom is the president, and three deputy members assigned to 1,265 designated polling stations.

<sup>24</sup> Member and deputy member in front of each of the 14 electoral lists at 1265 designated polling stations.

<sup>25</sup> CEC, Decision on publishing the total number of voters, <https://link.crtars/rd>

Amendments to the Law on the Unified Voters' Register, which entered into force May 11<sup>th</sup>. **CEC sent a request, but it is not known whether a response was received.**

In this reporting period, CEC decided on two objections. The first objection was submitted by the voter Petar Sikimić to the announcement of the electoral list *Belgrade Our City*, in which he pointed out that he had knowledge that his personal data was on the list of signatories of declarations of support for this electoral list. **The Commission rejected the complaint as unfounded.** The second objection was filed by voter Branko Stefanović against the Decision on publishing the total number of voters, CEC **rejected the objection as submitted by an unauthorised person.**

In the previous reporting period of the CRTA Observation Mission, CEC adopted all the necessary decisions and forms that regulate, inter alia, issues related to the nomination of members of the polling station committee<sup>26</sup>, arrangement of polling stations<sup>27</sup> and handing over election materials.<sup>28</sup> CEC also adopted the Schedule for conducting election activities.<sup>29</sup> The Decision on the coordinated implementation of elections for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly and councillors of the assemblies of city municipalities of the City of Belgrade was also adopted.<sup>30</sup> At its fourth session, the CEC also adopted the Decision on Determining Polling Stations<sup>31</sup>, with which, according to CEC, they took a step towards fulfilling the ODIHR recommendation that adequate spaces should be provided for polling stations in order to prevent crowds and ensure the secrecy of voting. The Decision on fees and other expenses, such as the fee for presidents and deputy presidents of election committees, was also adopted<sup>32</sup> doubling the amount in comparison to the previous elections – from 3,000 to 6,000 dinars.

#### 4.1. Candidacy process: collection and verification of signatures and proclamation of candidacies

A total of 14 election lists have been announced in this election process and will be on the ballot on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, while the deadline for submitting candidacies expired on May 12<sup>th</sup>. Six election lists that submitted their candidacies at the very end of the nomination period were proclaimed in this reporting period in the following order: *Belgrade our city (Greek national minority)*; *Roma Union of Serbia for Belgrade*; *Belgrade is the world – Justice and Reconciliation Party (Bosniak national minority)*; *Dr. Savo Manojlović – I am Belgrade – Go-change*; *Enough is enough – a solution for a change*; and *We – The Voice of the People*.

In the previous reporting period, from April 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 12<sup>th</sup>, eight election lists were announced in the following order: *Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow*; *Russian party – Serbs and Russians*

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<sup>26</sup> CEC, Decision on the procedure for nominating persons to polling station committees <https://link.crtars.org/mr>

<sup>27</sup> CEC, Decision on arrangement of polling station and voting premises <https://link.crtars.org/ms>

<sup>28</sup> CEC, Instructions on handing over election materials before and after voting <https://link.crtars.org/mt>

<sup>29</sup> CEC, Schedule for carrying out election activities in the election procedure <https://link.crtars.org/mu>

<sup>30</sup> CEC, Decision on the coordinated implementation of elections <https://link.crtars.org/mx>

<sup>31</sup> CEC, Decision on determining polling stations <https://link.crtars.org/mw>

<sup>32</sup> CEC, Decision on fees, material and other costs <https://link.crtars.org/mv>

*brothers forever; Dad, this is for you – Petar Đurić; Group of citizens – For a green Belgrade – Dr. Dejan Žujović; 1 out of 5 million – Belgrade Front – Rhythm of the City; We Choose Belgrade – Dobrica Veselinović; We are the strength of the people – prof. Dr. Branimir Nestorović; and People’s List – The Key to Victory.*

Out of the 14 declared electoral lists, four have the status of national minority electoral lists: *Russian party – Serbs and Russians brothers forever; Belgrade, our city (Greek minority); Roma Union of Serbia for Belgrade and Belgrade is the world – Party of Justice and Reconciliation (Bosniak national minority).*

For the city elections in Belgrade, the electoral list had to submit at least 3,000 signatures of voter support.

Supporting signatures for the electoral list and the candidate had to be certified, and **the notaries public and municipal and city administrations, as well as the basic court, judicial unit or reception office of the basic court, could be certifiers.**<sup>33</sup> According to the current regulations, each voter could support only one electoral list.

In the elections for the Assembly of the City of Belgrade, fourteen lists submitted their candidacies and all fourteen were declared. All candidates together collected **more than 59,000 signatures of voter support.**<sup>34</sup>

**It is striking that only 13,150 signed statements (22 percent) submitted in this election process were certified by public notaries, as the certification service of municipal administrations was mostly used.**

*Table 2. An overview of the total number of certified voters’ statements and their certification methods according to electoral lists*

<b>Electoral list</b>	<b>Notaries (%)</b>	<b>Municipalities (%)</b>	<b>Total number of submitted statements</b>
Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow	19%	81%	19,316

<sup>33</sup> The practice of using municipal notaries is again available to election candidates from 2020, when the election laws were amended to equalise the services of public notaries and municipal notaries. Until then, there was an obligation for signatures to be certified almost exclusively by notaries public – introduced in response to the mass falsification of voter support statements that marked the 2016 parliamentary elections. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Republic Electoral Commission found that more than 15,000 citizens’ declarations for seven submitted electoral lists had an element of forgery, one of which, the Republican Party, ended up on the collective electoral list. Those cases have not yet received a judicial epilogue. The last information obtained by CRTA about this procedure dates back to June 2020, when the first instance Court informed CRTA that the criminal proceedings were suspended, because an order for the issuance of a warrant was issued for one of the defendants, which has not yet been implemented. Giving exclusive status to public notaries served to ensure greater transparency, trust and equality in the candidacy process, as recommended by the ODIHR in the report on the observation of the parliamentary elections in 2016. In other words, the exclusion of municipal administrations was important in preventing illegal political influence in elections, to which local governments are susceptible since their officials are often the target of political pressure and clientelism.

<sup>34</sup> The minimum required number of signatures for the candidacy of one list for the elections to the Belgrade City Assembly is 3,000 based on the Law on Local Elections.

Russian party – Serbs and Russians brothers forever!	0	100%	1.666
Dad, this is for you – Petar Đurić	0	100%	3.134
Group of citizens – For a green Belgrade – Dr. Dejan Žujović	0	100%	3.224
1 out of 5 million – Belgrade front – Rhythm of the city	100%	0	3,480
We choose Belgrade – Dobrica Veselinović	24%	76%	5,557
We are the strength of the people – prof. dr Branimir Nestorović	28%	72%	3,397
People’s list – The key to victory	9%	91%	3,976
Belgrade is our city	0.11%	98.89%	1871
Roma Union of Serbia for Belgrade	52.54%	47.46%	1696
Belgrade is the world – Justice and Reconciliation Party	1.02%	98.98%	1871
Dr. Savo Manojlović – I’m Belgrade, too – Go- change	3.12%	96.88%	3523
Enough is enough – a solution for change	5%	95%	3181
We are the voice of the people	14.92%	85.08%	3600

Taking into account that during the previous elections, all the doubts related to the falsification of voter’s statements concerned only the statements certified by the municipal administrations, the circumstance of massive use of these services in these elections **also raises doubts about the integrity of the candidacy process from the perspective of the validity of signatures.**<sup>35</sup> Most

<sup>35</sup> The possibility of municipal administrations providing this service represents a step backwards in the regulation of the candidacy stage in the election process. As a result, the election is once again shaken by allegations of fraud. Most cases of falsification from the parliamentary elections in 2022, as well as the parliamentary and Belgrade elections in 2023, were linked to municipal administrations.



cases of falsification from the parliamentary elections in 2022, as well as the parliamentary and Belgrade elections in 2023, were linked to municipal administrations.

**In no way can it be claimed a *priori* that voter support statements collected for candidacy in the June Belgrade elections that are certified by municipal administrations are falsified. However, the question of the validity of the signatures that the City Electoral Commission recognised as valid is again a matter of concern.** Also, the question is how some of the election candidates collected the required number of signatures from the citizens of Belgrade, taking into account that there was no publicly available information about the place and time where citizens can sign these lists.

The cases that immediately attract attention concern the announcement of two electoral lists *Belgrade our city (Greek national minority)* and *We – The Voice of the People*. In the first case, a member of CEC in front of the Democratic Party pointed out at the meeting that his acquaintance was **on the list of signatories supporting this list without their knowledge or permission.**<sup>36</sup>

In another case, the same CEC member additionally stated that he did not receive an invitation to supplement the materials for the *We – The Voice of the People* electoral list, which was ordered by the conclusion to supplement the missing number of 323 signatures so that they could be certified no later than May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The CEC's conclusion was published on the web presentation of the Republican Electoral Commission on May 12<sup>th</sup> at 8:34 p.m., and this electoral list had to submit the missing signatures within 48 hours, but also to certify them by midnight that same day. In practice, this means that this electoral list had to organise at least 323 voters who will come to sign a statement of support for this electoral list in a little less than three and a half hours, as well as to find the certifier(s) who will certify 323 signatures in 206 minutes. Such a factual situation can certainly cause doubts about the validity of those declarations of voter support.

#### 4.1.1. Control of the validity of the voter's signature

**The City Electoral Commission controlled the validity and announced the list when it determined 3,000 valid signatures from the total number submitted.**

**The Electoral Commission does not control the surplus of signatures because according to the amendments to the Law on Local Elections from 2022, Article 43 states that: "If the applicant of the electoral list submits a greater number of valid written declarations of voters supporting that electoral list than the number he needs to proclaim the electoral list, the electoral commission takes into account only the number of signatures required for the proclamation of the electoral list, in alphabetical order of surnames of voters who signed declarations that they support the electoral list. For voters whose written statements to support an electoral list are disregarded, it will be assumed that they did not support that electoral list and their written**

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<sup>36</sup> The deputy member of CEC said that his acquaintance stated that he had never signed his support for this electoral list.

**statements to support another electoral list can be taken into account when deciding on another electoral list.”**

Given this circumstance, **the City Electoral Commission did not control all submitted signatures**, which is why it is not possible to fully analyse and evaluate their validity – more precisely, it is only possible to do this for the amount of signatures that the CEC processed until it determined the number needed to declare the list (3,000 valid).

When processing and controlling the submission of voters’ support statements, the City Electoral Commission returned to the applicants, i.e., rejected those **statements that are not legally valid** (no signature and/or stamp of the notary, no signature of the voter, invalid form, statement of support for the wrong list), if the voters have already supported another list, if the voters are not registered in the Unified Voters’ Register, if they are registered twice in the Voters’ Register, if their unique master citizen number is incorrectly entered, if the voter’s residence is located in the territory of another local self-government unit or due to a combination of any of these irregularities. It should be borne in mind that the number of voters who already supported another list for the lists submitted first had to be 0, while there could be one or more for each subsequent list or candidacy submitted.

The most common reason for rejecting voters’ statements was their **incorrect residence**, i.e. residence in another local self-government unit. This reason is present in all fourteen announced lists that were proclaimed between the first half of April and the second half of May. The second most common reason for rejecting signatures was related to the circumstance that the voter had already supported another list, which is noticeable in all lists that were announced later in the process, i.e. from number 5 to 14. On the other hand, **not a single case of a voter not being registered in the Unified Voter’s Register was recorded**.

The fact that **one list was supported by the same voter more than once** was recorded to a significant extent in the case of two lists: 11: *Dr. Savo Manojlović – I’m Belgrade, too, Go – change* and 14: *We are the Voice of the People*. In the list under serial number 11, this irregularity was recorded in as many as 244 cases and was dominant.

#### 4.1.2. Case study: Interpretation of the amendment to the Law on Unified Voters’ Register regarding the right to run for office in the June 2<sup>nd</sup> elections

Although the work of the city election administration in organising and conducting the elections for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly took place in accordance with the law, the CRTA Observation Mission received information **about a significant number of illegal decisions of the municipal Electoral Commission s in Belgrade related to the process of candidacy of lists in the elections for the assemblies 17 city municipalities, which are held in parallel**. Since the CRTA Observation Mission observes the elections for the Assembly of the City of Belgrade, the actions of the municipal Electoral Commission are not the subject of this analysis of the work of the election administration.

Nevertheless, **events at the level of other elections that are being conducted in parallel, such as the elections in 17 Belgrade municipalities, can create legal and judicial practice that can also affect the current city elections, but also shape the general election atmosphere.** The issue of the implementation of the new law, which came into force on May 11<sup>th</sup>, just before the deadline for submitting candidacies on May 12<sup>th</sup>, stirred up **great public interest.**

The fact that some voters, by almost immediately filing identical complaints with the municipal Electoral Commission, aimed to dispute the candidacies submitted after the amendments to the law came into force, by pointing out that some candidates on the lists do not meet the requirements for passive voting rights in the specific municipality because they changed their residence after July 3<sup>rd</sup>s, 2023<sup>37</sup>, opened the issue of unauthorised access to voters' personal data that is otherwise not available to the public. Accordingly, there is a suspicion that in this process too citizens' data were misused by state authorities which in a certain way made such data available to the complainants. It appears that the complainants used this data to specifically name candidates whom they believe do not have the right to vote.

Moreover, the question was raised at which point the amendment to the law becomes effective, bearing in mind that its application at the time of the conclusion of candidacies and submission of objections was in the earliest phase of implementation.<sup>38</sup> Also, the question arose as to whether the new law applies only to voters or also to candidates in the June 2<sup>nd</sup> elections.

The stance on the effectiveness of the new law and its scope, on the other hand, came from the judicial instance through the judgment of the High Court, which decided on the appeal received from a voter due to the rejection of the objection to the municipal Electoral Commission by which the voter challenged the right to be a candidate on the list in the Belgrade municipality Vračar "Dr Savo Manojlović – I'm Vračart oo – Go-change". One of the reasons why the court took the position that the candidacy of this list should be rejected is that it found that two candidates from the list do not have the right to vote in the municipality of Vračar.

The court hereby gave an unequivocal interpretation and judicial confirmation that **all persons who changed their place of residence after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, regardless of whether they are candidates or "only" voters, have the right to vote in that local self-government unit, that is, the city municipality, where they had their place of residence on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.** The High Court did not distinguish between voters and candidates, that is, active and passive suffrage, and took the correct position, since in the domestic legal system these are regulated by a single legal institute of electoral law. The High Court unequivocally put an end to the discussions on the issue and clearly established that the separation of active and passive voting rights is legal nonsense. Unfortunately, this kind of dispute came before the High Court only towards the end of the election process, and the fear remains that other electoral lists in the elections for city municipalities were declared in an illegal manner. In other words, there are indications that in the

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<sup>37</sup> If it is determined that at least one candidate for councillor on the election list does not meet the legal criteria for candidacy, the entire list is contested.

<sup>38</sup> Full implementation required the Ministry of Internal Affairs to prepare a list of all voters who registered their residence in the new local self-government unit after July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, and a corresponding change in the Unified Voters' Register performed by the Voters' Register clerks under the coordination of the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government.

elections for the assemblies of certain city municipalities everything was done in order to prevent such election lists from reaching the High Court. Such a *par excellence* legal issue was resolved in politicised and lay Electoral Commissions.

Furthermore, in the specific case, the complainant did not list the names of the candidates that he considers to have no right to vote, but asked the court to examine whether all the candidates on the electoral list have the right to vote.

## 4.2. Conclusion of the Unified Voters' Register and polling stations in Belgrade

In the Belgrade elections on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, voting will take place at **1,265 polling stations, i.e. 85 more stations** than in December 2023.<sup>39</sup> In Serbia, voting is personal and is carried out only at polling stations, without the possibility of electronic voting or voting by mail, so the determination of polling stations is an important element of the electoral process, as it can affect the rights of voters, as well as the outcome of the election.

**The Unified Voters' Register was closed on May 17<sup>th</sup> at midnight, in accordance with the legal deadlines. According to the conclusion, 1,602,112 citizens of Belgrade of legal age have the right to vote in the elections for the Belgrade City Assembly on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. The moment of closing the Voters' Register is also the moment when the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government took over the responsibility of updating the Voters' Register from the municipal administrations, which they will deal with up to 72 hours until the opening of the polls on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. According to the law, the MDULS implements changes in the Voters' Register only at the request of voters.**

**In the previous periodic report, the CRTA Observation Mission indicated that the number of new polling stations (85) is significantly lower than the number of polling stations in the City of Belgrade, which until now had more than 1,800 voters (267).** The polling stations were not simply divided into two new ones, but there was an unclear mixing of territories in the formation of new polling stations.

The request for information of public importance, which was forwarded to the addresses of Belgrade municipalities, received a half-hearted response (Table 3).

- **Seven Belgrade municipalities sent a response that might be considered appropriate.** Čukarica, Obrenovac, Savski Venac and Stari Grad submitted information on the increase in the number of polling stations, with clarification on the transfer of voters. Mladenovac, Sopot and Vračar submitted a response that there was no change in the number or territories of polling stations in the territories of these city municipalities.

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<sup>39</sup> At the fourth session, held on April 13<sup>th</sup>, the City Electoral Commission adopted the Decision on determining the polling stations in the territory of the city of Belgrade for voting in the elections for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly. The announcement of the CEC states that when drafting the proposal for the decision, the recommendations from the Final Report of the ODIHR observation mission on the parliamentary elections held on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 were taken into account, that the existing polling stations with more than 1,800 voters be divided, CEC, Announcement – Sessions of the CEC , <https://link.crt.rs/my>

- **Five municipalities submitted incomplete answers.** Grocka, Novi Beograd, Surčin, Voždovac, Zvezdara submitted information on the increase in the number of polling stations, but the submitted information does not show the manner in which voters were moved within the municipalities.
- **Four municipalities submitted inadequate answers.** In their responses to the request for information of public importance, Barajevo, Lazarevac, Palilula and Zemun did not provide information on changes in the number of polling stations or on the manner in which voters were moved.
- The municipality of Rakovica **did not submit a response** to the request for information of public importance.

*Table 3. Overview of the responses of Belgrade municipalities to the request for information of public importance regarding the change of polling stations for the Belgrade elections held on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024*

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>The answer</b>
Čukarica	Complete response provided	Increasing the number of polling stations, with clarification on the transfer of voters
Obrenovac	Complete response provided	Increasing the number of polling stations, with clarification on the transfer of voters
Savski Venac	Complete response provided	Increasing the number of polling stations, with clarification on the transfer of voters
Stari Grad	Complete response provided	Increasing the number of polling stations, with clarification on the transfer of voters
Mladenovac	Complete response provided	There were no changes
Sopot	Complete response provided	There were no changes
Vračar	Complete response provided	There were no changes
Grocka	Half-hearted response submitted	Increasing the number of polling stations, without clarification on the transfer of voters
Novi Beograd	Half-hearted response submitted	Increasing the number of polling stations, without clarification on the transfer of voters
Surčin	Half-hearted response submitted	Increasing the number of polling stations, without clarification on the transfer of voters
Voždovac	Half-hearted response submitted	Increasing the number of polling stations, without clarification on the transfer of voters
Zvezdara	Half-hearted response submitted	Increasing the number of polling stations, without clarification on the transfer of voters
Barajevo	Inadequate response submitted	No information provided
Lazarevac	Inadequate response submitted	No information provided
Palilula	Inadequate response submitted	No information provided
Zemun	Inadequate response submitted	No information provided
Rakovica	No response was submitted	No information provided

Considering the half-hearted response received to the request for information of public importance regarding the change of polling stations, the picture of the changes of polling stations in 2024 is only partially clarified.

Of particular concern is the fact that one of the largest actions to change the territory of polling stations in the last few years was carried out in order to divide polling stations with more than 1,800 voters in an adequate way in order to improve the electoral process, and after the conclusion of the number of voters, 32 polling stations are still registered with over 1,800 voters (Table 4). The distribution of these polling stations also calls into question the way in which the change in the territory of the polling stations was carried out, considering that a larger number of polling stations with more than 1,800 voters are registered in only two Belgrade municipalities after the implemented decision – Voždovac (19 polling stations) and Novi Beograd (8 polling stations).

*Table 4. The ratio of the number of polling stations with more than 1,800 registered voters for the elections on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and the elections on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, by municipality*

Municipality	Number of polling stations with over 1,800 voters	
	December 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2023	June 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2024
Voždovac	51	19
Novi Beograd	28	8
Zvezdara	52	1
Čukarica	30	1
Surčin	9	1
Zemun	9	1
Obrenovac	4	1
Palilula	48	0
Grocka	24	0
Rakovica	7	0
Savski Venac	3	0
Lazarevac	1	0
Stari Grad	1	0
Vračar	0	0
Barajevo	0	0
Mladenovac	0	0
Sopot	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>32</i>

If the change in the territory of the polling stations was carried out in order to relieve the burden on the existing polling stations, the question remains open as to why the remaining polling stations were not simply divided in half and new polling stations formed. If it was clear that by

redrawing the territories of polling stations it was not possible to reduce the number of voters below 1,800 at all polling stations, why were other solutions not considered as an alternative, such as adding a larger number of voting screens at existing polling stations, which would speed up the election process.

The lack of transparency in the way the audit of polling station territories is carried out, as well as insufficient attention to communication with voters, will potentially **cause doubts among voters**, especially those who have been voting in the same place for years or decades.

## 6. The course of the election campaign

The campaign leading up to the Belgrade elections was marked by a blurred line between the party and the state, between local elections and the national campaign on major national issues, as well as by the dominance of the figure of the President.

Using all institutional advantages, the state directed its activities on the ground to stimulate voters. Together with party officials and activists, public functionaries, most often mayors of municipalities, participated in the activities of the ruling list on a daily basis. About 700 appearances of the highest public officials during the election campaign are recorded. Both state officials and officials of the parties in power sent unison messages in which the issue of state integrity suppressed the local character of the Belgrade elections, presenting them as a referendum on confidence in the President to defend the country's key interests at a crucial moment for the Republic. The ruling coalition completely based its campaign on the associative relationship with the state and the president of the state.

The campaign was also marked by cases of physical and verbal attacks, obstructions during the collection of supporting signatures for the candidacy, but also pressures on citizens, which from one election cycle to another are proving to be a chronic problem of society and an integral part of the political culture in Serbia.

The main findings of the CRTA Observation Mission indicate an almost complete **absence of pluralism in the media** during the election campaign. The almost **absolute dominance of representatives of the government** is reflected in the average representation of 93 percent, while the opposition was present with only 7 percent, which represents the continuation of the trend of favouring the government that CRTA recorded during 2023 and in the first three months of 2024. **The media reporting is biased and polarising**, where the government is reported mostly neutrally, then positively, and almost never negatively. On the other hand, the opposition is reported mostly negatively, then neutrally and rarely positively.

**All television stations with national coverage, including the public media service, reported very similarly, showing unanimous and unified reporting.** Topics relevant to the local elections in Belgrade were far behind.

Aleksandar Vučić, although not a candidate, had a central role in the media as well. In the 55 days of the campaign, he addressed the public 55 times through the most influential televisions and achieved twice as much time in the central news than all the election actors combined.

This campaign is further characterised by the discrediting certain candidates with the help of artificial intelligence.



## 6.1. Field campaign

### 6.1.1. An overview of the activities of political parties in the field

According to the number of recorded activities, **the parties in power absolutely dominated the campaign on the ground**. Since the announcement of the elections, CRTA's observers have recorded around 1,500 activities of political parties, around 1,000 being activities of the parties of the ruling coalition. The greater presence of the ruling coalition on the ground is partly a consequence of the events ahead of the election campaign concerning the negotiations regarding election conditions<sup>40</sup>, and in connection with that, negotiations within the opposition bloc regarding joint performance. These circumstances caused some of the opposition parties to later join the campaign, and some to boycott the elections.<sup>41</sup>

**The activities of the "Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow" coalition** intensified even before the official kick-off of the campaign, as early as in the second half of February. In the period that followed, the ruling list mobilised voters with stalls on the streets<sup>42</sup>, a door-to-door campaign<sup>43</sup>, party rallies<sup>44</sup>, gift giving<sup>45</sup>, space planning actions<sup>46</sup> and the like. The municipalities where these activities are most common<sup>47</sup> are those in which the government had worse results in the December elections. It was noticed that party officials and activists from other cities and municipalities also participate in the activities of this party<sup>48</sup>, especially from Vojvodina, who come to Belgrade in an organised manner.<sup>49</sup> The promotional activities of the ruling party included the organised provision of legal advice<sup>50</sup>, despite the position of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption that it is not allowed. Infrastructure projects stand out from the thematic focus of this coalition<sup>51</sup>, the very topic of elections<sup>52</sup>, sports<sup>53</sup>, ecology<sup>54</sup> and agriculture<sup>55</sup>. However, narratives about tradition also surged to the forefront in waves<sup>56</sup>, to the

<sup>40</sup> RTS, "In the Serbian Parliament, discussions on ODIHR recommendations concluded, and opposition representatives left the meeting", April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/or>

<sup>41</sup> RSE, "Boycott or not, opposition divided over Belgrade elections", April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/os>

<sup>42</sup> Instagram, SNS Savski venac, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/ov>

<sup>43</sup> Instagram, SNS Lazarevac, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/ow>

Instagram, SNS Lazarevac, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/ox>

Instagram, Miloš Stojanović, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/oy>

<sup>44</sup> Instagram, SNS Savski venac, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/oz>

<sup>45</sup> Instagram, SNS Rakovica, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p0>

Instagram, SNS Rakovica, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p1>

<sup>46</sup> Instagram, SNS Savski venac, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/p2>

Instagram, SNS Rakovica, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p3>

<sup>47</sup> Novi Beograd, Zvezdara, Voždovac and Savski Venac and Palilula (in which the ruling party achieved results that do not deviate from the average at the city level).

<sup>48</sup> Branislav Nedimović, for example, was often present in the municipality of Surčin for a long period of time.

Instagram, SNS Surčin, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p4>

<sup>49</sup> According to the information obtained by CRTA's observers, the municipalities and cities where party officials and activists came in an organised manner were Odžaci, Karavukovo, Smederevo, Bački Petrovac, Kulpin, Pančevo, Ruma, Indija, Sombor, Subotica, Vršac, Zrenjanin, Kragujevac and Požarevac.

<sup>50</sup> Instagram, SNS Palilula, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p5>

<sup>51</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/p7>

<sup>52</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p7>

<sup>53</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/p8>

<sup>54</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/p9>

<sup>55</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pa>

<sup>56</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pb>

state<sup>57</sup> and the army<sup>58</sup> and national issues such as Kosovo<sup>59</sup>, Srebrenica<sup>60</sup>, but also Expo<sup>61</sup> (which are key points in the election message on the web presentation of the coalition “Aleksandar Vučić – Serbia Tomorrow”<sup>62</sup>). Since the beginning of the campaign, the ruling party’s messages have mostly been directed towards pensioners<sup>63</sup>, farmers<sup>64</sup>, minorities<sup>65</sup>, the socially disadvantaged<sup>66</sup>, persons with disabilities<sup>67</sup>, but a large number of activities for children are also organised<sup>68</sup>. Party events for businessmen were also organised in the last weeks.<sup>69</sup>

**The activities of the opposition parties** became more visible only in the second part of the election campaign. Although on an incomparably smaller scale compared to the ruling list, some of the opposition parties (especially those that formed the coalition I choose to fight, the election list Go-change and the parties gathered around the People’s List) carried out promotional activities in the form of stands, talks with citizens and distribution of flyers.<sup>70</sup> At the end of the campaign, the 1 out of 5 million/Rhythm of the City stands, as well as flyers of the list “Dad, this is for you” could be seen on the streets of Belgrade.<sup>71</sup> In the first part of the campaign, the representatives of the opposition parties primarily drew the public’s attention to the election conditions and the necessity of fulfilling the ODIHR recommendations, but in the second part the focus was also on issues of ecology and infrastructure (urbanisation, public transport).

The largest number of party activities was recorded in the municipalities of Palilula, Zvezdara, Novi Beograd and Lazarevac.

### 6.1.2. Obstructions when collecting signatures of support for candidacy

The campaign was also marked by numerous **allegations of obstructions during the collection of signatures of support for the candidacy**. Opposition parties have repeatedly reported that they could not get certifiers.<sup>72</sup> CRTA’s observers spoke with activists of the Green-Left Front, who stated that the notaries did not want to go to the field (Rakovica), that they received answers to their requests that the notaries did not have free time slots (Zvezdara), that they were on vacation or that they did not have stamps in the municipality (Voždovac), that they were only

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<sup>57</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pc>

<sup>58</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pe>

<sup>59</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pf>

<sup>60</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pg>

<sup>61</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Serbia, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/ph>

<sup>62</sup> “Election message”, <https://link.crt.rs/pi>

<sup>63</sup> Instagram, Darija Kisić, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pj>

<sup>64</sup> Instagram, Jelena Tanasković, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pk>

<sup>65</sup> Instagram, Darija Kisić, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pl>

<sup>66</sup> Instagram, Relja Ognjenović, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pm>

<sup>67</sup> Instagram, SNS Vračar, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pn>

<sup>68</sup> Instagram, SNS Savski Venac, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/po>

<sup>69</sup> Instagram, SNS Grocka, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pq>

<sup>70</sup> X (Twitter), Dobrica Veselinović, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pr>

X (Twitter), Go-Change, May 25<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/ps>

X (Twitter), People’s Party, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/pt>

<sup>71</sup> X (Twitter), 1 out of 5 millions, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pv>

X (Twitter), Petar Đurić, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pw>

<sup>72</sup> Vreme, “Race Against Time: The regime does not give the opposition notaries and notaries?”, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/pw>

given certificates for a few hours a day, and the certificates only arrived on the day of collection, and they could not even announce on social networks the place and time of collection (Savski Venac). Green-Left Front activists also pointed out that they had problems with scheduling the premises of local communities (Zvezdara). The activists of Go-Change also told CRTA's observers that they did not receive any written clue about what the municipality would provide them, and although they were told that they would receive five, only one or two certifiers appeared on the field, which caused crowds and queues. The Go-Change activists even pointed out that in one municipality the certifying officer showed the members of the Go-Change the messages she received from the municipality in which she was suggested to defer action and take breaks in order to collect as few signatures as possible and that she allegedly later had a problem in the municipality because she "certified too many signatures". They also pointed to a new type of obstruction, because, according to their reasoning, the invalid signatures were the signatures of people who had already signed their support for SNS and who were instructed to obstruct the signature collection process in this way. Claims by the opposition that their certifiers were prevented were followed by denials from the municipalities and SNS municipal boards that the obstruction existed.

At the locations for collecting signatures of the "Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow" list, CRTA observers did not notice crowds (except where the highest public officials were present), and in the conversation with the citizens present, it was noted that ID cards were taken from citizens and returned after scanning. This raises doubts about the possibility of unauthorised collection of personal data, but also the question of whether the procedures where the signatories must sign in person have been respected. Accusations also appeared in public<sup>73</sup> that the three lists that submitted signatures, without previously announcing the collection of signatures, obtained signatures irregularly. At the locations for collecting signatures of those lists that were publicly announced and that were visited by the CRTA observers, no crowds or behaviour that would indicate irregularities were observed.

### 6.1.3. Equalisation of state and party

**The merging of the state and the party was manifested in all aspects of the ruling party's campaign.** The blurred line between the party and the state is accompanied by abuse of public office<sup>74</sup>, of state institutions<sup>75</sup>, resources<sup>76</sup> and markings<sup>77</sup>. The party's identification with the state community provided an additional advantage to the ruling party, which was already more

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<sup>73</sup> Danas, "Who is the patriarch of the Serbian opposition?": Dejan Žujović responds to accusations about signatures for the Belgrade elections, <https://link.crtars/n1>

<sup>74</sup> Instagram, Relja Ognjenović, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/px>

Instagram, Aleksandar Šapić gradonačelnikbg May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/py>

Instagram, Adrijana Mesarović, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/q0>

<sup>75</sup> Instagram, Miloš Grčić, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/q1>

Instagram, SNS Savski venac, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crtars/q2>

Instagram, SNS Stari grad, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crtars/q3>

<sup>76</sup> Instagram, SNS Višnjica, My 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/q4>

<sup>77</sup> Instagram, SNS Belgrade, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/q5>

Instagram, Aleksandar Šapić gradonačelnik, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/q6>

visible than the other candidates. This identification is reflected in the very name of the ruling coalition, but also in the image of the ruling party, which is built through the activities of the government and the President.<sup>78</sup>

Together with party officials and activists, **public functionaries**, most often mayors of municipalities, **participated in the activities of the ruling list on a daily basis**. Public officials often acted in a dual capacity, promoting events organised by the City at party gatherings, and promoting party activities at public events. The practice observed in the December elections continued, where state officials, even on the same day, accompanied by the same persons and “at the same expense”, alternately attended both party and governmental activities during visits to a municipality.<sup>79</sup> The activities of both local and republic authorities were intensified even before the formal start of the campaign.<sup>80</sup> From April 3<sup>rd</sup>, when the elections for councillors of the Belgrade City Assembly were called, to the last week of the campaign, **more than a half of the total number of recorded activities of the highest public officials refers to participation in party promotion**. In more than 300 activities, about 700 appearances of the highest officials were recorded. The activities of the authorities were more intense in the municipalities of Obrenovac, Lazarevac and Sopot.

The practice of **promoting the party on the official accounts of public officials** continued, while **credits for public works and projects was attributed to the party on the party accounts**. State republic programmes, such as subsidies for energy efficiency, were also abused in the campaign<sup>81</sup>, preventive examinations in health institutions at weekends<sup>82</sup>, apartments for refugees and displaced persons<sup>83</sup>, solidarity packages for pensioners<sup>84</sup> and vouchers for patients with rare diseases<sup>85</sup>. Just like in December 2023, **the state’s participation in the elections is also reflected in the stimulation of citizens with extraordinary monetary donations**. In April, the city government announced funds in the amount of 20,000 dinars for parents of school-aged children, as well as free use of city swimming pools.<sup>86</sup> A series of promotional videos of the ruling party, launched in the final part of the campaign, promotes the activities of local governments and public companies and institutions. The directors of these institutions participate in the videos, but the objects and features of the institutions themselves also

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<sup>78</sup> Instagram, SNS Novi Beograd, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/q7>

<sup>79</sup> The Minister of Economy, Adrijana Mesarović, on the day she visited the municipality of Mladenovac in her capacity as a minister, visited the factory located there in the company of the mayor of the municipality, she also attended a gathering and celebration organised for businessmen in the party capacity, again in the company of the mayor of the municipality and the owner of the same factory in the capacity of minister.

Instagram, Adrijana Mesarović, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/q9> ; <https://link.crt.rs/qa>

Instagram, Adrijana Mesarović, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crt.rs/qa> ; <https://link.crt.rs/qa>

<sup>80</sup> Already since February 15<sup>th</sup>, intensive activity of state officials has been observed. They attended the ceremonial openings of factories and infrastructure works, ceremonies, and party stands. In the period from March 3<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, about 350 appearances of the highest officials at events, i.e. participation in party and government activities, were recorded. In the same period, 15 group appearances of state officials at various events were recorded.

<sup>81</sup> Instagram, SNS Rakovica, May 24<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/qc>

<sup>82</sup> X (Twitter), SNS Rakovica, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/qd>

<sup>83</sup> Instagram, Nataša Stanisavljević, May 10<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/qf>

<sup>84</sup> Instagram, SNS Rakovica, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/qg>

<sup>85</sup> Instagram, Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/qh>

<sup>86</sup> Instagram, SNS Rakovica, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/qi>

appear.<sup>87</sup> State insignia were found together with party insignia on the uniforms of party activists at numerous stands and in other party activities.<sup>88</sup> The equalisation of the party and the state is incarnated in the unison and coordinated reaction to the adoption of the resolution on Srebrenica.<sup>89</sup>

**The discourse of the ruling list is complementary to the discourse of the government.** The presence of a large number of the highest public officials<sup>90</sup> at events that send a message about the strength of the Serbian army<sup>91</sup> and a strong state that relies on traditional values<sup>92</sup> stands out as a special feature of the campaign.

**During the campaign, several cases with elements of misuse of public resources were recorded<sup>93</sup> (premises, vehicles, markings of state enterprises and institutions), functions<sup>94</sup> and national symbols<sup>95</sup>.** About 90 cases with elements of abuse of public resources, about 50 cases with elements of abuse of state symbols, as well as about 40 cases in which there is suspicion of abuse of public functions were recorded. Based on the report of long-term observers, 31 reports were submitted to the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption<sup>96</sup>.

#### 6.1.4. Referendum atmosphere and deepening polarisation

Although the political parties highlighted local problems in their campaigns and offered solutions for them, **the local character of the Belgrade elections remained in the shadow of major national issues.** In the discourse of the ruling party officials, and especially state officials, both the Belgrade and local elections are presented as **a referendum on trust in the president to defend the key interests of the country at a crucial moment for the Republic.** The narrative of the ruling party suggests that the upcoming elections on June 2<sup>nd</sup> are “fatal” because they will decide on preserving the independence and freedom of the state.<sup>97</sup> The same messages were communicated by the ruling party in December 2023,<sup>98</sup> but in the light of the events surrounding

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<sup>87</sup> Instagram, SNS Beograd, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qj>

Instagram, SNS Savski venac, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qk>

Instagram, SNS Voždovac, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/ql>

<sup>88</sup> Instagram, SNS Blok 61, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qm>

Instagram, SNS Rakovica, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qn>

<sup>89</sup> On the occasion of the adoption of the resolution in Srebrenica, members of the Government gathered in the Presidency, where they watched the broadcast of the session, wrapped in the flag of Serbia. At the same time, party officials gathered in the party premises and also watched the broadcast, covered with Serbian flags.

Instagram, Government of the Republic of Serbia, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qo>

Instagram, SNS Belgrade, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qp>

<sup>90</sup> The event with the highest number of high-ranking officials present is the panel on Aggression, “Merciful Angel” – 25 years since the NATO aggression, organised by the Foundation for the Serbian People and State.

Instagram, Maja Gojković, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qg>

<sup>91</sup> Instagram, Tomislav Momirović, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qq>

<sup>92</sup> Instagram, Foundation for the Serbian People and State, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qr>

<sup>93</sup> Instagram, SNS Block 38, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qs>

<sup>94</sup> Instagram, SNS Novi Belgrade, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5-4h8ys609/>

<sup>95</sup> Instagram, SNS Paviljoni, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qt>

<https://link.crta.rs/qu>

<sup>97</sup> Instagram, Goran Vesić, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crta.rs/qv>

<sup>98</sup> X (Twitter), SNS OO Indija, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <https://link.crta.rs/hk>

Kosovo and the Resolution on Srebrenica, they dominated the public space even in the inter-election period.

The referendum atmosphere is intensified by the tension between the two poles on the political scene, the government and the opposition. On the one hand, the government partly bases its campaign on the negative portrayal of opposition representatives, highlighting their “anti-state”<sup>99</sup> and “anti-Serbian”<sup>100</sup> actions. On the other hand, the messages of the opposition parties additionally strengthen the referendum perception of the upcoming elections, because the criticism of the government takes place on the basis of “for Vučić” and “against Vučić”, again underscoring the non-local context.<sup>101</sup> The fateful significance of the June elections is also embodied in the narratives about the hostile environment of Serbia, which implies labelling and discrediting the countries in the region, which was also communicated in the election messages of the ruling coalition and government representatives.<sup>102</sup>

Tensions resulted in violence. During the campaign, **political party activists** indicated that they were exposed to physical and verbal attacks. The ruling party announced that their activists were attacked in Novi Beograd by passers-by who were instructed by the opposition<sup>103</sup>, the National Movement of Serbia reported an attack on activists in Stari Grad<sup>104</sup>, an activist of the Green-Left Front was physically attacked on Zvezdara by masked assailants<sup>105</sup>, while in Voždovac SNS activists threatened the I choose the fight activists, trying to drive them away from the place where they had set up a promotional stand.<sup>106</sup> The incident also happened at the media conference on the removal of the rafts, when Aleksandar Šapić took the phone from the hand of one citizen present and threw it away.<sup>107</sup>

#### 6.1.5. Pressures on citizens and clientelistic relationship with citizens

**Thirty-two in-depth interviews**<sup>108</sup> and **more than forty conversations with citizens** conducted by CRTA’s observers during the campaign, confirm that **political pressures in society are normalised** and that political actors and citizens themselves consider them an indispensable part of political folklore in Serbia, i.e. an established instrument of political struggle. Testimonies also point to **an atmosphere of fear, as citizens rarely decide to report pressure**, but also to **citizens’ distrust in institutions** and their readiness and will to face this problem. During the previous years, in several of its researches and observational reports, CRTA drew

<sup>99</sup> Instagram, Vladimir Orlić, May 24<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crtars/gw>

Instagram, Branislav Malović, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/qx>

<sup>100</sup> Instagram, SNS Serbia, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/qy>

Politics, “Šapić: We choose whether we want to have a Serbian or an anti-Serbian government”, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024: <https://link.crtars/qz>

<sup>101</sup> X (Twitter), National Movement of Serbia Belgrade, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crtars/r0>

<sup>102</sup> Instagram, SNS Serbia, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/r1>

<sup>103</sup> Instagram, Relja Ognjenović, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.: <https://link.crtars/r2>

<sup>104</sup> X (Twitter), National Movement of Serbia, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crtars/r3>

<sup>105</sup> Instagram, Let’s not drown Belgrade, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/r4>

<sup>106</sup> X (Twitter), Free citizens, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crtars/r5>

<sup>107</sup> N1, “Šapić threw the phone at a citizen, talking with people on the verge of physical confrontation”, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/r6>

<sup>108</sup> All conducted interviews are anonymous and all personal data of the interviewees are protected.

attention to the necessity of solving this chronic problem in society, appealing to the competent authorities and institutions to react adequately. Of particular concern is the fact that the most vulnerable groups of society are most often exposed to pressure and are the easiest to manipulate, which puts them in an even more dependent and difficult position.

Employees in public utility companies, municipal administrations, preschool and school institutions, gerontological centres and associations of persons with disabilities testified about blackmail and fear. Numerous allegations are related to pressures ahead of party gatherings, to participation in party activities, as well as to giving political support to the party.

The period before the official start of the campaign was marked by numerous **allegations of pressure on employees who were brought from other cities** to Belgrade to participate in the door-to-door campaign. These allegations were confirmed by the CRTA's observers through several conversations and trips to the field. A campaign participant, who is employed in a public company in Zrenjanin, testified to CRTA that he and his colleagues are forced to work for the party in order to keep their jobs, as well as that such an "agreement" is taken for granted, and the employees participate by inertia and without resistance in party activities even when there is no explicit pressure from superiors. The interlocutor from Sombor also indicates that employees in the public sector in this city are under pressure to come to Belgrade during working hours, using organised official transport, and participate in party activities. This interlocutor also pointed to a potential case of falsification of official records, because certain employees were registered as if they were at work, even though they were on the streets of Belgrade campaigning that day.

Managers are also exposed to pressure in the public sector, as confirmed by one of CRTA's interlocutors who stated that **directors in public companies set aside part of their salary to finance the ruling party's call centre**, which is a mechanism that CRTA has already noted in its previous research.

The collected testimonies suggest that **employees in the public sector were especially under pressure on the eve of party rallies, but also on the eve of the reception of the Chinese president.**

The arrival of Chinese President Xi Jinping was announced in the media days earlier for May 8<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday). However, a day earlier on Tuesday, the official website of the President of Serbia announced that the reception of the Chinese President will take place on May 7<sup>th</sup> at the Belgrade airport, and the official reception in the morning hours in front of the Palace of Serbia. The day before the rally, CRTA's observers got in touch with an employee of the school who received an invitation from the director to go to Belgrade on the occasion of welcoming the Chinese president. Allegations of pressure from the ruling party on public sector employees to attend this event were confirmed by a tour of the said event. The CRTA's observers on the ground noted the organised transport of people from outside Belgrade, who were led in groups, the presence of party insignia, the presence of representatives of the ruling party's municipal committees. Through conversations with employees in the public sector, information was obtained that the

arrival to welcome the Chinese president was presented to them as “work duty”. One of the interlocutors, who has been working for the state bank for 20 years, testifies that she often receives directives from her superiors to attend party events (“you go to this one, you don’t have to go to that one, you go to this one and so on”). The interlocutor from Obrenovac testifies about the pressures on the employees of the public utility company and that the secretary of the company called the employees and gathered them in the director’s office on the day of the reception of the Chinese president. He also points out that on this occasion, vehicles owned by the company were used, which are normally intended for transporting workers to the industrial zone itself. The reception was also attended by heads of departments, employees of the municipality of Rakovica, who received instructions that a certain number of people from each department must attend. CRTA’s interlocutor, who is employed in the Municipality, testified that he was also invited, which he refused, and that for the time being, there were no consequences.

At the party rally in Lazarevac, which was attended by a large number of state officials, public sector employees arrived in buses with signs displaying the names of public companies and institutions. The CRTA observers conducted several interviews with the people present, among whom were **two interlocutors, who had fixed-term contracts in schools, who testified about the pressure to attend the rally**. According to one interlocutor, who is not active in the party, nor is she a member of the party, but she often attends rallies at the insistence of the director: “I go whenever they call me, sometimes I might need them”. Another interlocutor, who also received a call from the principal of her school, states that she was in Belgrade two days before when the Chinese president was there and that now she had to find a replacement for her lessons again (“when it comes to party matters – anything is possible”), so her colleagues who are full-time employees are replacing her.

Pressures on employees in public companies and institutions were also recorded on the eve of the announced rallies in Obrenovac, Mladenovac and Batajnica (which were later cancelled). The reports of observers from the field in Mladenovac bear witness to the great preparations for the rally that was supposed to take place on May 18<sup>th</sup> on the plateau in front of the Sports Centre, which was to be attended by the President of Serbia. In Mladenovac, the opposition’s posters were taken down in order to put up posters for this rally, and the city government had been asphaltting the sidewalk until the early hours of the morning before the rally. The announced mass gathering was supposed to be attended by employees of public companies and institutions, who “were obliged to come voluntarily”. A similar climate was noted in Obrenovac, where both the stage and the sound system were ready, and the parking spaces in the city centre were disabled for use the day before the rally, except for police and public companies’ vehicles. Preparations for the scheduled rally of the Serbian Progressive Party, which was supposed to be held in the City Square and for which Aleksandar Vučić and Ivica Dacić were announced, were also followed by allegations of pressure on employees of public companies. In the Obrenovac public utility company, the superior even asked for a written statement from the employees who were prevented from attending the rally in which they were supposed explain the reasons for their absence.



**In a series of conversations with representatives and members of associations of persons with disabilities, attention was drawn to a number of problems in the context of elections and political pressures that this community is facing.** Although public discussion often focuses on the accessibility of polling stations for these individuals, the manipulations and pressures they face as individuals and members of associations are overlooked<sup>109</sup>, including pressures to vote for a particular party and participate in party promotion. In the course of this election campaign, as well as the previous ones, political parties specifically focused their activities on this target group, stimulating them by organising events intended for this community<sup>110</sup>, but also by sharing gifts<sup>111</sup>. CRTA's interlocutors pointed to the party's control of associations and unions, which is carried out through competent state institutions, primarily the line ministry, on which these associations depend most financially.<sup>112</sup> As an example, they referred to the case of the list of support for the ruling party ahead of the December elections (Apel 2000).<sup>113</sup>, at which, despite the provisions in the statutes of the association, there were also representatives of these associations and unions. It was pointed out that the representatives of the association were under explicit pressure to provide political support to the party, but they also assumed that they could bear the consequences, in the form of a reduction in budget funds, if they did not provide support. According to CRTA's interlocutors, this happened because some associations were "punished" in this way. Due to political ineligibility, the interlocutors suspect that the associations are excluded from the processes that allow them to influence decision-making important for the functioning of their associations and community members.<sup>114</sup> The interlocutors draw attention to the fact that members of the association were asked to collect safe votes, to vote for the party, as well as to attend party events, and there is a suspicion that their data were misused.<sup>115</sup> This community is also exposed to manipulations that trample on their dignity – for example, the interlocutors point out that the target of political parties are usually the most vulnerable people from this community who are the easiest to manipulate, so, CRTA's interlocutor points out, one political party has "disabled people to show off and take

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<sup>109</sup> Interlocutor: "It's a general madness, we have that pressure and that blackmail and that mistreatment of people with disabilities... so open, so aggressive. And the most tragic thing is that it's done with the support of people with disabilities."

<sup>110</sup> Instagram, SNS Vračar, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/r7>

<sup>111</sup> Instagram, SNS Palilula, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/r8>

<sup>112</sup> "Financing of those associations goes both through the municipality and dominantly through the ministry (Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs). The 'cake' is divided between traditionalist organisations and phantom organisations that are suspected to have been founded by various SNS members. They remained aware of these malpractices, but fearing that they will lose what they have, that they will compromise their funding, they decide to remain silent and largely pursue a policy of non-reproach and partnership with the ministry, although nothing has been done to improve the position of people with disabilities."; "The Ministry, in this way, through financing, control, and close cooperation, keeps people with disabilities "in check", i.e., performs social control and prevents some loud criticism."; "The President of the Alliance (who signed the Appeal in 2000) also has that classic SNS attitude towards us who are part of the Alliance, that she yells at us. They (the president of the Alliance and the other signatories) are all scared because they are financed by the Ministry and that's it, if they don't give money – they're gone."

<sup>113</sup> The interlocutor stated that the authorities in the ministry have contacts of all associations that have received or are receiving funds from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs. "She explicitly asked them to support Aleksandar Vučić's list and recommended that it would be good." [...] Because if you care about the survival of your organisation and have something to do in the future you must sign this list."

<sup>114</sup> One organisation that did not sign Vučić's list had its annual budget reduced for the first time in 20 years. "Some organisations that didn't want to give support or said they couldn't, that it was against their statutes, really weren't on that list of support. It is interesting that one of those organisations, in the last competition, passed various projects with meaningless titles and goals, remained below the line. Now whether it is retaliation and the result of their refusal to give support, I don't know, we can speculate, but it catches the eye."

<sup>115</sup> Interlocutor: "She calls him to her office and says – let's try to influence people in your association to vote to be polled – and in a private conversation he all agrees while later saying that he had to..."

pictures of".<sup>116</sup> **Regarding the testimony of the interlocutors and the problems they referred to, CRTA addressed the Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality,** who expressed their concern because they had received such information before, but had not received formal complaints from representatives and members. That is why they invited members of the association and people with disabilities to contact these institutions so that they could react in a timely and adequate manner.

A worrying case recorded at the very end of the campaign illustrates **the abuse of children for the purpose of party promotion**, in which every red line is lost in the fight for political points. In a state preschool in the municipality of Stari Grad, the children, instead of attending a children's play, ended up attending a rally that turned into a political one, due to the praise the minister was giving to the president. According to the testimony of three CRTA's interlocutors, the mothers of the children who attended the meeting, this event was announced to the parents as a "free performance". One of the interlocutors also testified that her child ended up "as a safe vote" in the base of the ruling party. During the campaign, she received a call from the SNS call centre, where the operator was looking for her preschool-aged son by name. Confused, the interlocutor repeated the name twice, thinking it was a mistake. When she told them it was a minor, they hung up. The interlocutor suggests that it could have happened only from the kindergarten that her number was linked to her minor child. Parents of children enrolled in this institution also received a call from the party's call centre, but the operators asked for them by personal name.

In conversations with citizens, **the problem of clientelistic relations between parties and citizens** was pointed out, which implies the exchange of various resources and services for political support. CRTA's interlocutor pointed out that vote buying is taking place in Obrenovac local communities ahead of the upcoming elections, which means that **the party pays debts in exchange for votes**. According to his statement, debtor databases are checked (whereby the protection of personal data is threatened) in the Public Utility Company, EPS, Water Supply, and then someone would be sent to settle those accounts in exchange for safe votes. In this way, the members of the household who have a debt do not get the money, but the accounts are settled through a member of the party.

#### 6.1.6. Misuse of personal data

This election cycle is also marked by suspicions of **misuse of personal data by political parties, but also in some cases with the mediation and complicity of state institutions, establishments and companies.**

During the campaign, several citizens turned to CRTA in order to express their fear that their personal data was misused by political parties, since party activists (ruling parties), who called them by phone or came to their home addresses, had a large amount of sensitive data at their

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<sup>116</sup> Interlocutor: "Vučić was in Prijepolje and you can see one of his associates say – give that disabled person (someone from the crowd), and he is our former member".

disposal. The citizens also pointed out that the records they noticed with the party activists also contained separate information about people from those addresses who live abroad.

Suspicious that data from public institutions' databases and records, as well as from private companies, have been compromised and used to mobilise the electorate are further fuelled by CRTA's interlocutors, who reported receiving calls from party call centres on their work phone numbers, but also that **parties targeted people from socially disadvantaged groups, as well as households that have unpaid bills and debts for the services of public utility companies**. One CRTA's interlocutor from Obrenovac, who is employed in a public company, also states that during the collection of supporting signatures for the ruling list, the contacts of employees of public companies, primarily employees of subcontracting companies, were misused. The interlocutor points out that employees were called to come to the offices in order to bring ID cards, fill out forms and register.

Representatives of the association of persons with disabilities also pointed out the abuse of personal data of association members. In one case, as the interlocutor states, associates and members of the association were deceived because the representatives of the association asked them for personal data and a signature for "internal records that no one will see", relating to a certain project. In the end that data were used as signatures of support for a political party.

<sup>117</sup>

Personal data of citizens also appeared in promotional party videos<sup>118</sup>, and also in posts on social networks<sup>119</sup>.

## 6.2. Pluralism in the media

### 6.2.1. Representation and tone of reporting on political actors

The CRTA Observation Mission continuously monitors the state of pluralism in the media through media monitoring of the central news of five television stations with national coverage. In the period from April 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024, CRTA's observers analysed more than 2,750 minutes of central news from RTS 1, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy and TV B92.

**The almost complete absence of pluralism is reflected in the extremely unequal position and access to the media of the representatives of the government and the opposition.** The findings of the monitoring show **an almost absolute dominance of government representatives**, with an

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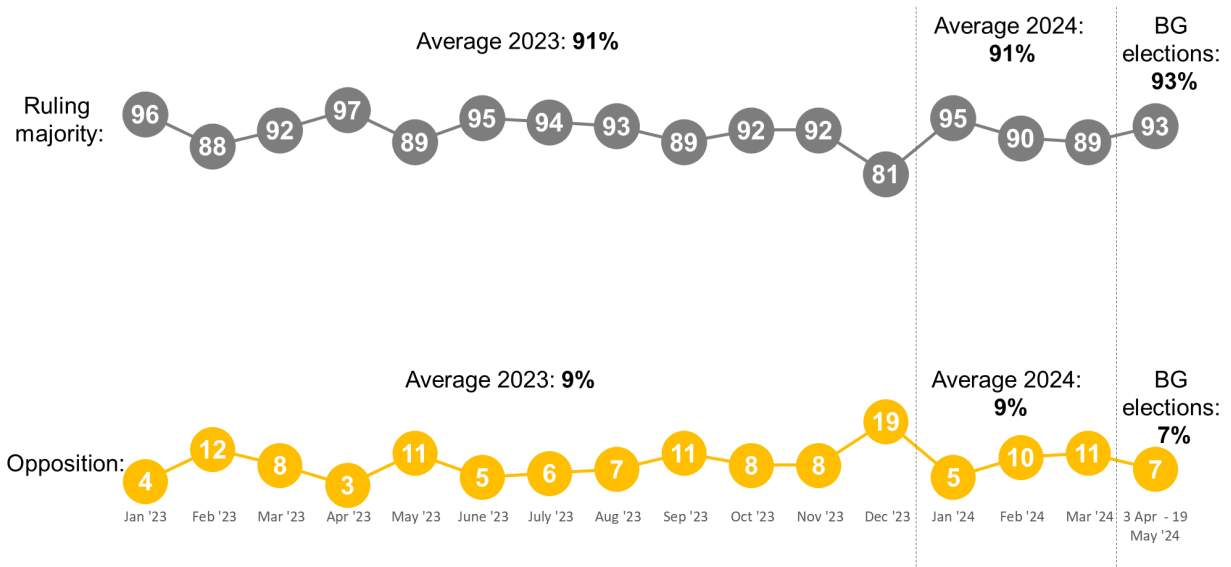
<sup>117</sup> "They told them that it was internal, that no one would see it, we just need it in order to get more projects. [...] They knew who they were going to call, people who are not politically informed, who will say if it is internal then I am not interested (it is not a problem for me). One girl, when they called her, said that she did not plan to vote for the ruling party, the woman who called her said that she did not have to vote and that it was internal in order to give them a list to move on with the projects. When the list of "support" signatories was published, some of those people who were there unwillingly were shocked and angry, but they realised that it was their own fault because they didn't tell them what they needed the signatures for, and that it would remain a secret. [...] They labelled users but protected themselves."

<sup>118</sup> Instagram, Relja Ognjenović, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/r9/>

<sup>119</sup> X (Twitter), CRTA, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/ra>

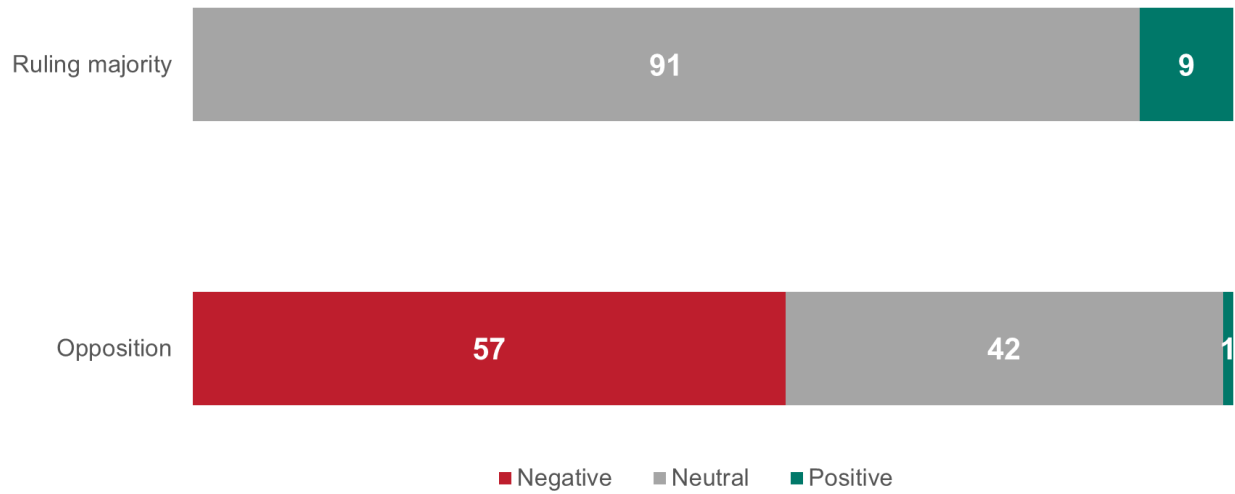
average representation of 93 percent. The opposition was present with only 7 percent. **This represents a continuation of the trend of favouring government representatives that CRTA recorded during 2023, as well as in the first three months of 2024.** (Chart 1)

*Graph 1. Comparison of television coverage with national coverage in central news according to the representation of political actors by month (January 2023 – April 2024)*



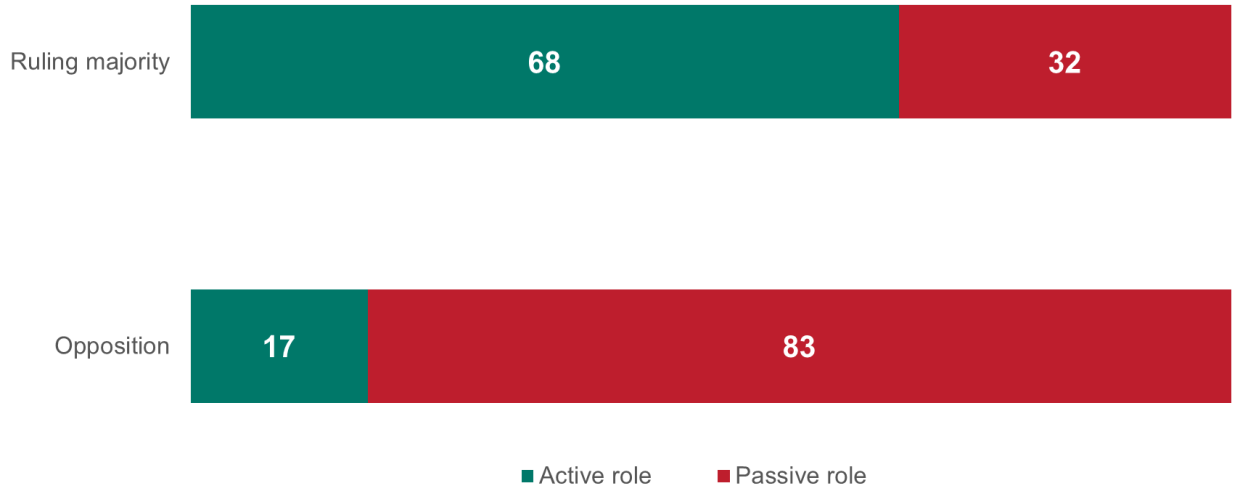
**Media reporting is biased and polarising in favour of government representatives**, who are shown mostly in a neutral and then positive light. Specifically, 91 percent of reports on the government were neutral, 9 percent were positive, and less than 0.1 percent were negative. On the other hand, the opposition is presented dominantly negatively in 57 percent of cases, neutrally in 42 percent, and almost never positively (0.7 percent). (Chart 2)

*Chart 2. The tone of reporting on political actors in the central news of five television stations with national coverage in the election campaign for the Belgrade elections*



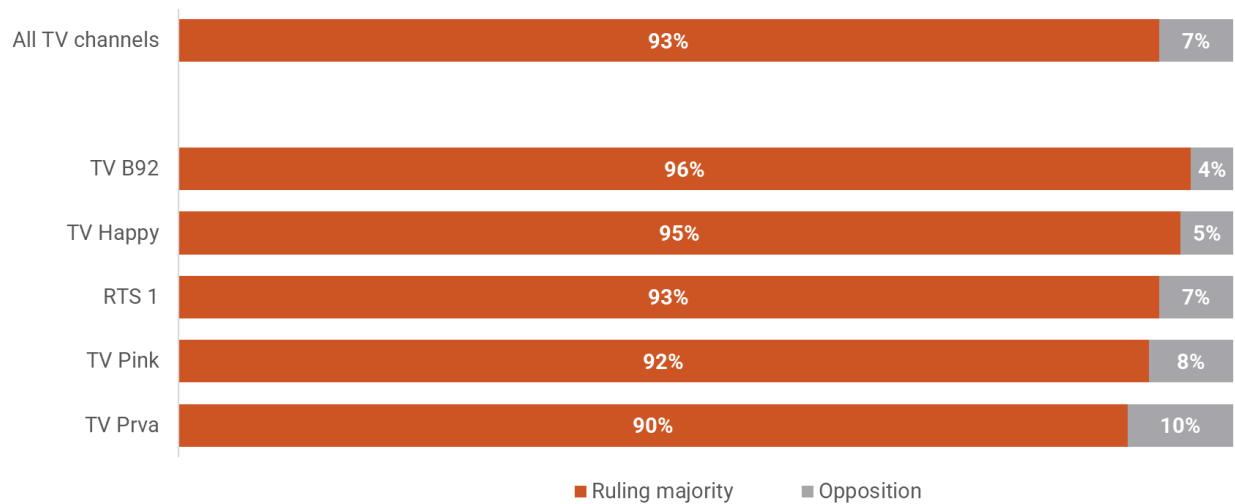
**During the campaign, television stations gave priority to government representatives when it came to direct access to the media in central news.** They spoke directly to the audience in the first person (active role) a little more than 2/3 of the time (68 percent), while others spoke about them, for example news presenters or other interlocutors (passive role) in 1/3 of the time (32 percent). On the other hand, representatives of the opposition had the opportunity to address the audience directly in less than 1/5 of the time (17 percent), while they were talked about in 83 percent of the time. (Chart 3)

Chart 3. The role of political actors in the central news of five television stations with national coverage in the election campaign for the Belgrade elections



**All televisions with national coverage favoured the government, devoting it more than 90 percent of the time, and in this sense, we conclude that there is no significant difference between the televisions when it comes to reporting on the government and the opposition.** Television B92 is in the lead with 96 percent of the time dedicated to representatives of the government (Chart 4), while TV Pink, B92 and TV Happy reported the most biased about the government and the opposition. (Chart 5)

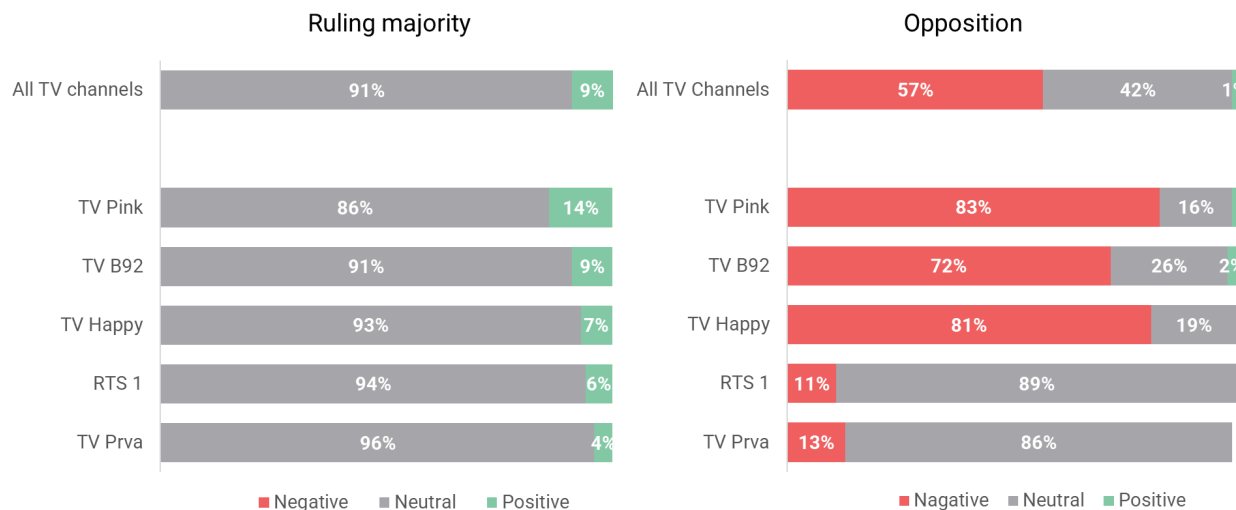
Chart 4. Representation of political actors in the central news of five television stations with national coverage in the election campaign for the Belgrade elections



Although TV Pink most often reported on the government neutrally (86 percent), positive reporting was absolutely dominant (14 percent) as negative reporting was non-existent. The opposition was reported on TV Pink predominantly negatively (83 percent), then neutrally (16 percent) and rarely positively (one percent). TV B92 reported in an almost identical way, mostly neutrally (91 percent), then positively (9 percent) and never negatively. The opposition was represented predominantly negatively (72 percent), then neutrally (26 percent) and positively in two percent. TV Happy reported on the government mostly neutrally (93 percent), then positively (7 percent) and never negatively, while the opposition was presented dominantly negatively (81 percent), then neutrally (19 percent) and never positively. (Chart 5)

Although the way of reporting is somewhat milder on the remaining commercial television with national coverage, on TV Prva, the reporting mechanism is identical to the one used by the three mentioned televisions. The ruling majority has a dominant position 90 percent of the time. TV Prva also favours the government by presenting a neutral (96 percent) or positive (four percent) image, but never a negative one. The opposition is presented neutrally (86 percent of TV Prva) or negatively (14 percent of TV Prva) and never positively. (Chart 5)

*Chart 5. The tone of reporting on political actors in the central news of five television stations with national coverage in the election campaign for the Belgrade elections*



During the current campaign, Pink television repeated the practice from August 2023, using generated voices created by artificial intelligence that sound like the voice of the holder of the list “Dr. Savo Manojlović – I am Belgrade – Go-Change”, Sava Manojlović. Immediately after the submission of the “Go-change” list on May 12<sup>th</sup>, Pink television started a campaign aimed at discrediting this candidate by playing the aforementioned video. In just two days, on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, Pink TV aired as many as 17 reports in which the video from the show “Impression of the Week” was misused, in which the created voice of Savo Manojlović was added. CRTA, as in the case from August 2023, submitted a report to the REM due to this abuse. According to the confirmation of one of the members of the REM, Višnja Arandžević, the REM initiated proceedings against Pink regarding this video. Regarding CRTA’s complaint from August 2023, the REM reacted with a statement<sup>120</sup> in which it reminds media service providers of the legal obligations when using artificial intelligence. However, by searching the register of pronounced measures,<sup>121</sup> it is impossible to find a decision regarding the complaint that CRTA submitted at that time.

Furthermore, since April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Pink TV has introduced special programme content within the information programme “Belgrade News”, which is broadcast twice a day as part of the information programme. That programme is filled with features celebrating the successes of the city government, in the form of reports on activities such as the opening of nurseries and kindergartens,<sup>122</sup> children’s playgrounds,<sup>123</sup> renovation of health centres<sup>124</sup> and roads,<sup>125</sup> city markets,<sup>126</sup> grant of financial aid to different categories of citizens of Belgrade.<sup>127</sup> It is not rare

<sup>120</sup> REM, Announcement regarding the use of artificial intelligence opportunities in PMS programmes, <https://link.crtars/oe>

<sup>121</sup> REM, Pronounced measures, <https://link.crtars/oa>

<sup>122</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Report on the construction of a kindergarten in Borča, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/ns>

<sup>123</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, A new playground was built in Ovča, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/nt>

<sup>124</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Health centre with the most modern equipment in Borča, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://link.crtars/nu>

<sup>125</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Renovation of the road network in Barajevo, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/nv>

<sup>126</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Reconstruction of the Kalenić Market-Prestonica will get the “Hypermodern Market”, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 <https://link.crtars/nw>

<sup>127</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Application for financial aid to parents of pupils, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars/nx>



that these features report on projects that were implemented a few years ago, which further manipulates the public by glorifying the success of the current government. A special focus is placed on large projects such as “Belgrade Water Front”,<sup>128</sup> Galerija shopping centre,<sup>129</sup> Expo 2027<sup>130</sup> and the beginning of the construction of the depot for the future subway in Belgrade.<sup>131</sup>

The glorification of the city government is reflected in features in which citizens express their satisfaction with the implemented projects<sup>132</sup> and they thank the president<sup>133</sup> and other government representatives.<sup>134</sup> What also appears are the images of city areas were portrayed as decrepit, non-functional, or ruined before being renovated or otherwise improved by the current government.<sup>135</sup> On the other hand, the opposition is presented as a group of critics without arguments and breakers of progress in the capital.

An unequal approach to directly addressing the audience is also evident, where TV Pink (77 percent in an active role compared to 23 percent in a passive role) and RTS 1 (67 percent in an active role compared to 33 percent in a passive role) give the biggest advantage to the ruling majority. On the other hand, on televisions B92 (100 percent in a passive role), TV Happy (99 percent in a passive role) and TV Prva (92 percent in a passive role), representatives of the opposition had almost no opportunity to address the audience directly. (Chart 6)

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<sup>128</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Selfie bridge-promotion of Belgrade on the water, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/ny>

<sup>129</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, TC Gallery exudes Serbian tradition, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/o8>

<sup>130</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Expo-Prokop, better traffic connection with the city centre, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/nz>

<sup>131</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Tour of works on the construction of the main depot for the first line of the BG subway, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/o0>

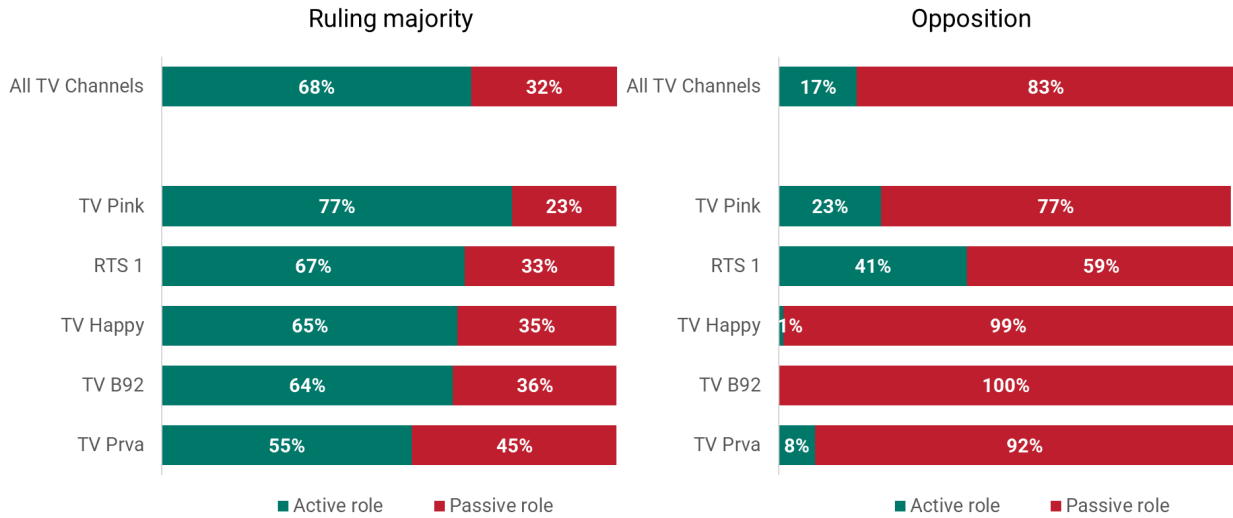
<sup>132</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Renovated market Stari mercator, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/o2>

<sup>133</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Reconstruction of the Smederevo road – Thanks to President Vučić, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/o3>

<sup>134</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News, Renovated Stari Mercator Market; Thanks to the mayor, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/o4>

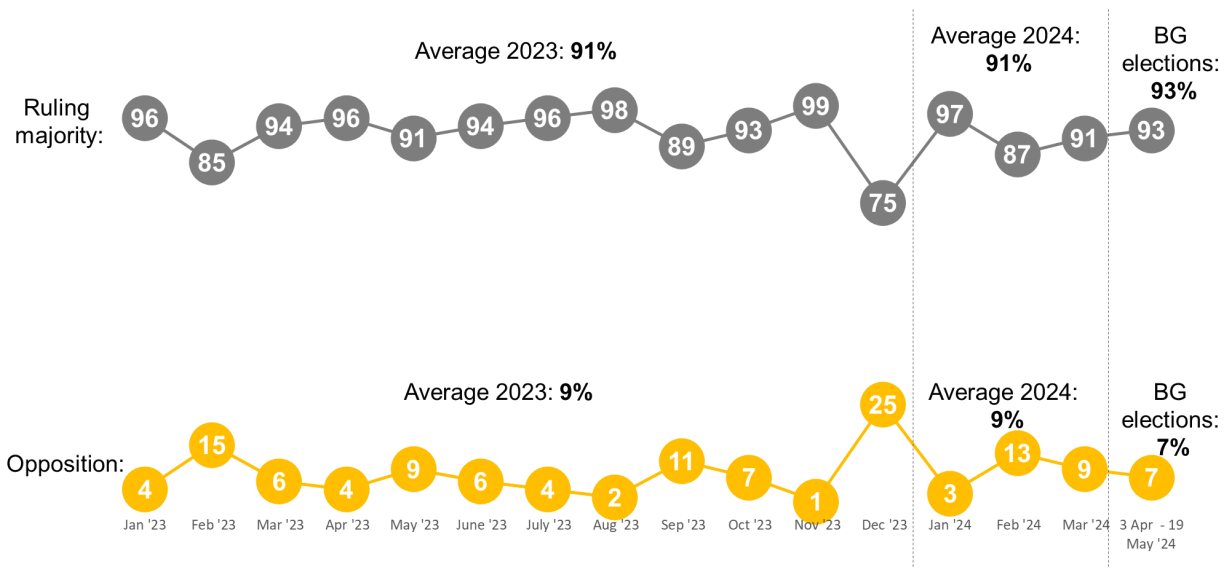
<sup>135</sup> TV Pink, Belgrade News; Column “Once and Now”, Reconstructed Pionir Hall, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/o6>

Chart 6. The role of political actors in the central news of five television stations with national coverage in the election campaign for the Belgrade elections



RTS reporting within Dnevnik 2 does not differ significantly from the reporting of other television stations with national coverage, and it is characterised by a **bias in favour of the ruling majority**. The representation of actors of the ruling majority during 2023 and 2024 is 92 percent on average, and it was the same during the election campaign for the Belgrade elections – the ruling majority was allocated 93 percent of the time (Chart 7).

Chart 7. Comparison of RTS reporting in Dnevnik 2 according to the representation of political actors by month (January 2023 – April 2024)



Although RTS reports somewhat more neutrally on both government and opposition representatives compared to the majority of commercial television stations, biased reporting in favour of the ruling majority is evident – it is presented most often neutrally (94 percent), then positively (6 percent) and almost never negatively (less than one percent). Representatives of the opposition were most often presented neutrally (89 percent), then negatively (11 percent), while there was no positive coverage of the opposition in the first part of the campaign (Chart 5).

**The semblance of pluralism that existed in the media in previous election cycles, and which occurred due to the opening of electoral blocs, was absent in this election campaign.** Two of the five television stations (TV Happy and TV B92) did not even broadcast election blocks in the central news, while on RTS it was broadcast sporadically and negligibly. It was broadcast mostly on Prva and Pink televisions.

**The dominance of the ruling majority was also noted when it comes to political marketing.** Since the beginning of the campaign, only the Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia advertising has been observed. Political advertising on television started on May 16<sup>th</sup>. The new Rulebook of the REM on the manner of performing the obligations of media service providers during the election campaign<sup>136</sup> on May 18<sup>th</sup> came into force. Nonetheless, although the Rulebook states that “political advertising messages may not be made during the central news broadcast”, the CRTA observation mission recorded political ads in the central news on Pink, Happy and B92 televisions.

## 6.2.2. The role of the President of Serbia in the election campaign for local elections

**Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić remains the most dominant political figure despite the fact that the Belgrade elections have been called. He is allocated twice as much time in the central news if compared to all political actors combined.** He was presented mostly neutrally (87 percent), then positively (13 percent), and never negatively. In 70 percent of the time he had an active role when addressing the audience in the first person in the central news, while he was in a passive role when he was being talked in about 30 percent of the time.

**The role of the president is even more pronounced if one takes into account the number of his direct involvement in the programmes of various television stations.** In the first 55 days of the election campaign, he went live in the programmes of various televisions as many as 55 times, and since the beginning of the year 119 times.

The glorification of the image of President Vučić is also evident through the frequent promotion of infrastructure projects and other initiatives at the state and city level. Since the beginning of

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<sup>136</sup> REM, Rulebook of the REM on the manner of performing the obligations of media service providers during the election campaign, <https://link.crt.rs/o7>

the campaign for the Belgrade elections, CRTA has recorded at least 66 features in the news in which citizens, the media, representatives of local authorities, and state officials and directors of public institutions and companies thanked or underpinned the President's contribution to the implementation of infrastructure projects and other initiatives that were conducive to improving the quality of life of citizens.

### 6.2.3. Media language in the service of deepening divisions in society

**The referendum atmosphere recorded in the December 2023 elections is still present** in the media. It is characterised by polarisation and a black-and-white presentation of the political offer. Insisting on **the differences between "Us" and "Them" turns out to be a central mechanism in almost all pre-election content.**

CRTA recorded more than 2,100 guest appearances in morning programmes and other socio-political television shows with national coverage. **The absolute dominance of government representatives** can be seen in the number of guest appearances by government and opposition representatives: **220 for the former and 12 for the latter on television with national coverage.** During the entire campaign, not a single guest appearance of the opposition candidates was recorded on televisions Pink, Happy and B92.

The personality cult of President Aleksandar Vučić is meticulously built, so all political actors present themselves through the prism of "for or against him". Vučić is presented as the only one who can oppose the "interests of the West", as a "statesman who leads a sovereign and freedom-loving policy", while the opposition actors are presented as followers of the West with whom they want to "jointly occupy Serbia".

In the observed period, the most dominant topics were the vote on the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, the admission of Kosovo to the Council of Europe and the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Serbia. The impression is created that the "superhuman" struggle of Aleksandar Vučić is responsible for all the successes of Serbian diplomacy.

Even though on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the elections for the Belgrade City Assembly are being voted on, local topics were rarely represented. The campaign, in which local and national themes were merged into messages of national values that are reflected in the spread of the idea of Serbianness, was presented as crucial for the future of Serbia. Messages about crucial elections were posted even before the kick-off of the campaign, so the current Prime Minister, Miloš Vučević, stated on his Instagram profile on March 16<sup>th</sup> that **"the Belgrade elections are not only a matter of communal problems and infrastructure, but also the defence of the future of Belgrade and**

**Serbia, that must move forward.”**<sup>137</sup> The candidate for mayor of Belgrade in front of the list of the ruling majority, Aleksandar Šapić, and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, said that these are “**valuable elections, elections in which Serbia, i.e. Belgrade, decides which direction Serbia will take.**”<sup>138</sup> and that “**the Belgrade elections, much more than the local elections, decide how Serbia will continue.**”<sup>139</sup> On May 19<sup>th</sup>, Aleksandar Vučić sent a similar message in the morning programme of Pink television, stating that a vote in local elections is not “a vote only for the people at the local level but also for the people who lead this country.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Kurir, VUČEVIĆ: The Belgrade elections are the defence of the future of Belgrade and Serbia, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/oj>

<sup>138</sup> Šapić: The elections in Belgrade decide which direction Serbia will take, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/oh>

<sup>139</sup> SNS pre-election rally in Čačak, Maz 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/oj>

<sup>140</sup> TV Pink, Morning with soul, Vučić: “I am proud of our fight for Serbia”, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024, <https://link.crta.rs/ok>

## 7. Action of independent institutions

### 7.1. Agency for Prevention of Corruption

The action of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption is slower than in the previous election cycle, although legal provisions prescribe action within short deadlines.<sup>141</sup> In the course of the campaign so far, CRTA has submitted a total of 31 complaints to the Agency, of which the largest number pertains to this reporting period. The first completions of the Agency's procedures were registered only in the last weeks of the election campaign, although the complaints were submitted by the CRTA Observation Mission in the second half of April.

CRTA noted that the actors to whom the reports referred later sent their responses to the Agency about the allegations in the complaint, which is why the Agency was unable to act efficiently within its legal deadlines. Also, as one of the factors that influenced the slower response of actors, and to which the representatives of the Agency drew their attention at the meeting with the Observation Mission, is the large number of non-working days that this election campaign included.

So far, the Agency has decided on ten complaints and in **five cases, which refer to the organisation of humanitarian activities, i.e. activities that do not belong to the scope of political campaign activities by the Serbian Progressive Party, it found a violation of the Law on Financing Political Activities, while in five cases it found that there was no violation of the law** – in four cases against the Serbian Progressive Party for abuse of public resources and in one case against the then Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management – Jelena Tanasković, for abuse of office.<sup>142</sup> Given the small number of decisions made so far, even in this reporting period it is not possible to assess the quality of the legal positions taken by the Agency in relation to the principles of impartial and equal application of the law towards electoral actors.

The agency has opened a special section "Elections 2024" on its website, where all the activities of this state body in the election campaign are published. This section contains announcements, news and decisions on complaints.

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<sup>141</sup> Article 37 paragraph 5 of the Law on Financing of Political Activities

<sup>142</sup> On its website, the Agency published a total of two decisions, i.e. decisions due to violations of the Law on Financing of Political Activities, in which it decided on three lines of application because it included two applications in one decision. The first decision established that there was no basis for deciding on the existence of a violation of the provisions of Article 23 of the Law on financing political activities during the election campaign against the Serbian Progressive Party. The second decision established that the Serbian Progressive Party had twice acted contrary to the provision of Article 23, paragraph 1, in connection with Article 2, paragraph 5 of the Law on the Financing of Political Activities, in the way that it had carried out activities that do not represent an election campaign, because, in the first case, on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 in the premises of the Municipal Board of Zvezdara, it organised the provision of free legal aid to citizens, while, in another case, in the premises of the Municipal Board of Palilula, it organised the provision of free legal aid to citizens and that in the same premises it organised free preparatory lessons in Serbian language and mathematics for eighth grade pupils. By the same decision, due to the established violations of the law, the Serbian Progressive Party was issued a warning measure obliging it to remove the controversial posts from its Instagram and Facebook pages and not to organise activities providing free legal aid to citizens and free preparatory classes for students in its premises in the future during the election campaign. The decision on the fourth complaint was not published on the Agency's website because it is a complaint for violation of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and the law does not provide for the obligation to make those decisions public.

**The only announcement on the Agency's website refers to the submission of preliminary and final reports on election campaign expenses.** The agency informed the political entities that they have the obligation to submit a preliminary and final report on the expenses of the election campaign by May 26<sup>th</sup>, that is, 30 days from the date of publication of the overall report on the election results.<sup>143</sup>

## 7.2. Regulatory body of electronic media

**In the last week of the campaign, the Regulatory Body of Electronic Media launched the first examination procedure, in which they will determine whether by displaying content in which the candidate's statement in the elections was changed using artificial intelligence represent a violation of regulations. Complaints submitted to the REM regarding possible violations of obligations by television stations in connection with the election campaign were not published on the REM's official website. A step in the right direction is the fact that for the first time after 2020, commercial broadcasters are included in the new Rulebook on the manner of performing the obligations of media service providers during the election campaign, which entered into force on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Nevertheless, until the date of closing of this report, the REM did not supervise the new obligations imposed by the Rulebook.**

### 7.2.1. Effects of the Rulebook on the manner of performing the obligations of media service providers during the election campaign

Less than two weeks before the start of the election silence, on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, to be precise, the new Rulebook of the REM on the manner of performing the obligations of media service providers during the election campaign entered into force, which, for the first time since 2019, more closely defines the obligations that not only public media services, but also commercial media service providers have during the election campaign. During the public debate on this Rulebook, the REM rejected the suggestion<sup>144</sup> put forward by civil society organisation to precisely regulate with this act the way in which itself supervises the work of the PMS during the campaign, which was proposed to the REM specifically in order to avoid doubts in the future about the sample on which supervision is carried out and the supervision methodology. Above all, the suggestion was offered so that the REM itself would establish the periods in which it will report on the findings of the election monitoring.

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<sup>143</sup> Political subjects are obliged to submit the preliminary and final report on the expenses of the election campaign in both electronic and written form, with the fact that it is now possible for political subjects that possess a qualified certificate for electronic signature to submit the reports only in electronic form if the report contains an electronic signature. The preliminary and final report shows all data on income and expenses incurred in connection with the election campaign, i.e., all data on the origin, amount and structure of collected and spent funds from public and private sources, credits and loans are shown.

<sup>144</sup> Regulatory Body of Electronic Media, Report on the conducted public discussion <https://link.crtg.rs/og>

While adopting the new Rulebook, the REM did not foresee a postponement of the application of its provisions, so the rules it sets are binding for all media under the REM's jurisdiction, starting from May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Those rules include inter alia an explicit ban on reporting that provides a privileged position to public office holders, a ban on reporting that contains a special promotional reference to the submitters of electoral lists or candidates or their activities, ideas or political views, in an open or covert way – through subliminal messages, compromised reporting, taking out of context, hidden censorship, inadequate contextualisation, etc.

The ban on displaying political advertising messages during the central news broadcast is also a novelty. CRTA's monitoring showed that Pink and Happy television stations did not respect the ban on showing political marketing in their central dailies – “Nacionalni dnevnik” and “Telemaster”. The REM did not publish preliminary findings on the application of the new rulebook.

### 7.2.2. Proceedings of the REM during the election campaign

The REM did not establish a monitoring plan nor did it carry out systematic monitoring of the implementation of the obligations prescribed by the Law on Electronic Media in connection with the election campaign. Given that the monitoring was not carried out, the public was also deprived of reports on the representation of the election participants, i.e, the way in which the media report on them during the current campaign.

The absence of systematic supervision also affected the fact that the REM only exceptionally used its legal powers to initiate procedures in cases of violations of the law ex officio, that is, upon complaints.

**CRTA has so far submitted a total of 15 complaints to the REM during the course of the campaign.**<sup>145</sup> In some of them, CRTA accused the use of very aggressive rhetoric, including hate speech against opposition leaders and activists, who are portrayed as anti-Serb elements who hate Serbia and everything Serbian, and whose main goal is to remove President Vučić.

With the entry of Savo Manojlović into the campaign, a wave of attacks targeting him began. Consequently, in just two days, in the informational program of the Pink television, in seventeen slots, a video of Manojlović's previous guest appearance on the show “Impression of the Week” was shown. In that video, instead of Manojlović's authentic statements, a voice narration generated by artificial intelligence was integrated that sounds like the voice of Savo Manojlović and that expresses derogatory views about him. On May 20, Crta submitted a report to REM due to the display of this content.<sup>146</sup> At the session held on May 24, REM initiated proceedings

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<sup>145</sup> Applications are available at the link <https://crt.rs/crtine-prijave/>, in the section Elections 2024 - Applications to the Regulatory Body of Electronic Media

<sup>146</sup> CRTA, Complaint against TV Pink <https://link.crt.rs/oc>



against TV Pink. However, the public was not informed about this on REM's official website<sup>147</sup> the news has already been published in the media.<sup>148</sup> CRTA, as the complainant, has no knowledge of whether the procedure was initiated ex officio on the basis of her application or whether the REM found out about the committed offense in another way.

Attacks on the holder of the Go-Change list continued on local television, which repeated the identical video on numerous occasions, alluding to the fact that Manojlović is a foreign mercenary.

In parallel with the attacks on the opposition and its leaders, both local and national televisions, in violation of the legal ban, reported on the ceremonial activities of officials who are candidates at the same time. Also, in different ways, they enabled public officials-representatives of the government to promote the joint electoral list of the ruling majority. Pančevo television went the furthest, since it abused children for electoral purposes, showing the performance of a children's choir as part of the election program in which it reported on the activities of the city manager who is also a candidate on the electoral list of the ruling coalition.

## 8. Meetings of the CRTA Observation Missions with relevant institutions and political actors

**CRTA, as part of long-term observation, sent a meeting invitation to relevant institutions and political actors** who have competences in different parts of the electoral process, in order to gain insight and gather information about their work. Information about the quality of the process that precedes the election day, the exercise of the competences of the relevant institutions, as well as the possible challenges that the institutions and political actors face in their work, **enable CRTA to gain a broader picture of the quality of the election conditions, as well as the general course of all relevant aspects of the election process.**

**Institutions' responses to CRTA's invitation are different. The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade and the Working Group of the Ministry of the Interior for Supporting the Improvement of the Electoral Process in Serbia did not respond to CRTA's invitation at all,** while the High Court in Belgrade replied that it was unable to meet with the representatives of the Observation Mission because it had already started to decide on certain cases related to the election procedure. Furthermore, they informed CRTA that they have taken measures to provide true, timely and complete information to citizens about their actions in accordance with the Law

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<sup>147</sup> The only information from the session held on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024 can be found in the agenda of the 485<sup>th</sup> extraordinary session, which was published on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and which states that one of the items on the agenda was "Consideration and decision-making on the initiation of investigation against PMS Pink Media Group d.o.o., Belgrade - TV Pink", without specifying which specific case or at least the date of the screening. The REM will publish the minutes from that session only after the next regular session, since minutes are only adopted at regular sessions. <https://link.crtars.rs/od>

<sup>148</sup> Cenzolovka, REM initiated proceedings against Pink due to a video of Sava Manojlović edited with the help of artificial intelligence, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://link.crtars.rs/ob>

on Local Elections, by creating a special section on their website dedicated to this election procedure, and emphasised there would be a person in charge of informing the public – a spokesperson. **The Regulatory Body of Electronic Media**, after a repeated invitation, scheduled a meeting for the day before election day, June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Institutions that **responded positively** to CRTA's invitation and with whom the meeting was held are the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, the Protector of Citizens, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and the City Electoral Commission. The Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality have particularly expressed their concern regarding certain cases that include endangering the rights of the most vulnerable groups of people with the aim of conducting the election campaign.

CRTA also sent an invitation to the representatives of the following proclaimed electoral lists: "ALEKSANDAR VUCIĆ – BELGRADE TOMORROW", "We choose Belgrade – Dobrica Veselinović – Miloš Pavlović", "DR SAVO MANOJLOVIĆ - I AM BELGRADE – GO-CHANGE", "WE THE STRENGTH OF THE PEOPLE, prof. Dr. Branimir Nestorović", "1 OF 5 MILLION – BELGRADE FRONT – CITY RHYTHM – DUŠAN TEODOSIJEVIĆ MAYOR", "PEOPLE'S LIST – KEY TO VICTORY" and "ROMA UNION OF SERBIA – FOR BELGRADE", wanting to gain a clearer insight into the quality of the conduct of elections, application of laws and conditions for campaign implementation. So far, **CRTA has not received a response from any representative of the given electoral lists.**

## 9. Complaints of the CRTA Observation Mission in the campaign for the Belgrade elections

Based on the information collected by long-term observers in this period, CRTA submitted **46** complaints for various types of irregularities in the election process. **31** reports were submitted to the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption due to cases of abuse of public resources and public functions and illegal activities of political parties. **15** reports were submitted to the Regulatory Body of Electronic Media for cases of negative campaigns and public officials' campaigning.

CRTA also submitted **an initiative to the Third Basic Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade to initiate misdemeanour proceedings for misuse of the coat of arms and flag of the Republic of Serbia.** Moreover, on the basis of the data collected by CRTA, the partner organisation **Partners of Serbia submitted an initiative for supervision to the Commissioner for Information of Public**

**Importance and Protection of Personal Data in two cases.**<sup>149</sup> So far, CRTA has not received any responses from the relevant institutions regarding these actions.

## 9.1. Complaints to the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption

### **Twenty-five complaints were filed against the Serbian Progressive Party for violating the Law on the Financing of Political Activities:**

- Organisation of humanitarian activities (donation of a wheelchair by a political party to its member, event of March 29<sup>th</sup>, Palilula).
- Organising and providing free legal assistance in the premises of the municipal board in the municipality of Zvezdara (announcement on Instagram and Facebook account from April 18<sup>th</sup>, Zvezdara).
- Organising and providing free legal assistance in the premises of the municipal board in the municipality of Palilula (announcement on Instagram and Facebook page of SNS, from April 15<sup>th</sup>, Palilula).
- Use of public resources for the purpose of promoting the party – abuse of public resources (Publishing a video on the official Facebook page of SNS about works on the improvement of the Sava bank, in which you can see the machinery of the Public Water Management Company “Srbijavode” and workers in official uniform, while in the corner of the video there was the logo of the SNS political party at all times, announcement from April 23<sup>rd</sup>, New Belgrade).
- Publication of a promotional video on the official Facebook page of SNS Voždovac about the reconstruction of the kindergarten (posted on the Facebook page on May 10, Voždovac).
- Publication of a promotional video about clearing the banks of the Sava in New Belgrade, which was attended by Goran Puzović – director of the the Public Water Management Company “Srbijavode” and Irena Vujović – Minister of Environmental Protection, on the official Instagram page of SNS New Belgrade (posting on the Instagram page, from April 28<sup>th</sup>, New Belgrade).
- Organisation of humanitarian activities, i.e. humanitarian tournament and distribution of jerseys to children of the local football club in Obrenovac (announcement on Instagram and Facebook page, from May 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, Obrenovac).
- Use of city administration projects in the field of education for promotional political purposes (post on Facebook and Instagram page dated May 10<sup>th</sup>, New Belgrade).

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<sup>149</sup> The first initiative for supervision was submitted to the Commissioner due to the disputed promotional video of the Serbian Progressive Party, which showed the identity cards of voters who signed their support for the electoral list. The second initiative was submitted due to the publication of Vladimir Đukanović in which he announced the authorisation of the Electoral Commission of the municipality of Vračar, in which the unique master citizen numbers of CRTA observers were disclosed.

- Organising humanitarian activities, i.e. repeated distribution of jerseys to children in local football clubs in Obrenovac, for the purpose of promoting political parties and electoral lists (post on Instagram and Facebook page, from May 12<sup>th</sup>, Obrenovac).
- Organising humanitarian activities, specifically, in the form of giving away a television set to a household in Mladenovac (announcement on Facebook and Instagram page, from May 10<sup>th</sup>, Mladenovac).
- Use of infrastructure projects implemented by public funds in the municipality of Čukarica for the promotion of a political party (post on the Instagram page, dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, Čukarica).
- Use of infrastructure projects implemented by public funds in the municipality of Savski venac for the promotion of a political party. A person who is a candidate for councillor also appears in the promotional video (posted on the Instagram page, dated May 20<sup>th</sup>, Savski venac).
- Organising humanitarian activities in the form of providing assistance to households in Mladenovac (announcement on the Instagram page, dated May 21, Mladenovac).
- Organising humanitarian activities in the form of giving away a bicycle to a family in Palilula (post on the Instagram page, from May 16<sup>th</sup>, Palilula).
- Use of infrastructure projects implemented by public funds in the municipality of Barajevo for the promotion of a political party (post on the Instagram page, dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, Barajevo).
- Use of infrastructure projects implemented by public funds in the municipality of Čukarica for the promotion of a political party. The promotional video also features a person who is an official and a candidate for councillor (post on the Instagram page, dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, Čukarica).
- Use of infrastructure projects implemented by public funds in the municipality of Surčin and investments in education in the municipality of Sopot for the promotion of a political party (post on the Instagram page, dated May 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, Surčin and Sopot).
- Organising humanitarian activities, i.e. repeated distribution of jerseys to children in five local football clubs in Obrenovac, for the purpose of promoting political parties and electoral lists (announcement on Instagram and Facebook page, from May 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, Obrenovac).
- Use of projects financed from public funds related to providing assistance to parents for children, in order to promote the SNS political party (post on Instagram account dated May 18<sup>th</sup>, Barajevo).
- Use of projects financed from public funds related to the construction of a kindergarten in Grocka, in order to promote the SNS political party (post on Instagram account, dated May 19<sup>th</sup>, Grocka).
- Use of projects financed from public funds, i.e. use of subsidies from the city municipality of Lazarevac in order to promote the SNS political party (post on Instagram account, dated May 17<sup>th</sup>, Lazarevac).

- Use of projects financed from public funds, specifically the use of free textbooks for children in the territory of Belgrade in order to promote the SNS political party (post on Instagram account, dated May 17<sup>th</sup>, Stari grad).
- The use of infrastructure projects from public funds, specifically the sights of different cities, which have been financed or will be financed from public funds, as discussed by the list holder and member of the SNS presidency, Aleksandar Vučić, in order to promote the SNS political party and the electoral list (post on Instagram order, dated May 16<sup>th</sup>, Voždovac).
- Use of infrastructure projects financed from public revenues, specifically the Prokop railway station, in order to promote the SNS political party (post on Instagram account, dated May 16<sup>th</sup>, Savski venac).
- Organising humanitarian activities, i.e. giving away several aid packages to families in order to promote the SNS political party. The activity was also attended by Dragana Knežević, candidate for local elections (post on Instagram account, dated May 16<sup>th</sup>, Lazarevac).

**Six complaints were filed for abuse of public office and misuse of public resources in the campaign, i.e. violation of the Law on Prevention of Corruption:**

- Complaint against Jelena Tanasković, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, member of the Management Board of the Fund for the Development of the Republic of Serbia and member of the SNS political party, for using her public office to promote the SNS, when during a visit to an agricultural farm she talked about aid state at the same time promoted the electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow".
- Complaint against Bojan Bovan, president of the municipality of Novi Belgrade and a member of the SNS political party for using his public office to promote the SNS, in the way that he used the official website of the municipality to promote the election list "Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow".
- Complaint against Bojan Stević, president of the city municipality of Lazarevac and a candidate on the electoral list of SNS, because he abused his public office when he talked with citizens about implemented projects and those that will be implemented from the budget of the City Board Lazarevac, promoting a political party.
- Complaint against Milorad Grčić, assistant to the president of the Obrenovac city municipality and a member of the SNS political party, for abusing his position when he promoted the SNS political party while speaking about the government's achievements in the field of road construction and asphaltting.
- Complaint against Miroslav Čučković, assistant to the mayor of the city of Belgrade and a candidate on the SNS electoral list, for abusing his position when he spoke about paved roads and promoted the SNS political party.
- Complaint against Aleksandar Šapić, president of the temporary body of the city of Belgrade and candidate for councillor, for abuse of office because he used projects financed by the public

revenues of the city administration on his official Instagram account for the sake of promoting the political party SNS and the electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić – Belgrade tomorrow ".

## 9.2. Complaints to the Regulatory Body of Electronic Media

**CRTA submitted fifteen complaints to the REM regarding violations of obligations committed during the election campaign. The following were filed against commercial television stations with national coverage: seven against TV Pink and three against TV Happy. Of the remaining five, three complaints were filed against the local television station TV Pančevo, one against Studio B and one against TV Informer.**

**Seven complaints were filed against Pink TV, for the following reasons:**

- Display of content in which the statements of Nataša Kandić, Biljana Đorđević and Marinika Tepić were used in order to present them in a particularly negative context, thereby violating the obligations of the media service to prohibit hate speech, violation of personal dignity and the right to the authenticity of the person to whom the information relates. and a unilateral attack on the face (content shown on April 11<sup>th</sup>).

- Displaying content in which the statement of the activist Aida Ćorović was maliciously interpreted and linked to the statements of Nataša Kandić, Biljana Đorđević and Marinika Tepić about the genocide in Srebrenica, in such a way that the media service provider violated its obligation to prohibit hate speech, to respect the right to the authenticity of persons to which the information relates and the prohibition of unilateral and repeated attacks on the person to whom the information relates (content shown on April 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>).

- Presentation of the report within the programmes "Nacionalni dnevnik" and "Minut dva" about Sava Manojlović, in which, in addition to the video recording of Sava Manojlović from his guest appearance on the show "Impression of the Week", instead of his authentic statements, a voice narration is integrated that sounds like the voice of Sava Manojlović, but in fact was generated by the use of artificial intelligence, whereby the media service provider violated its obligations of truthful and objective reporting, prohibitions against abusing the gullibility of viewers, violations of the obligation to respect the right to privacy and violations of obligations related to the election campaign (content shown on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>).

- The presentation of a feature in the show "Nacionalni dnevnik" in which a negative campaign was conducted against representatives of the opposition, which violated the media service provider's obligation to provide true, objective, complete and timely information (content shown on April 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>).

- The presentation of a feature in the show "Nacionalni dnevnik" in which a negative campaign was conducted against representatives of the opposition, which violated the media service

provider's obligation to provide true, objective, complete and timely information (content shown on April 27<sup>th</sup>).

- The presentation of the report on the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica in the show "Nacionalni dnevnik", which was shown with the aim of running a negative campaign against the representative of the opposition, Dobrica Veselinović, whereby the media service provider violated its obligation to provide true, objective, complete and timely information (content shown on April 28<sup>th</sup>).

- Violations of the ban on publishing political advertising in central news programmes (content shown from May 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>).

**Three complaints were filed against Happy TV, for the following reasons:**

- Showing content in which the guest of the show, Vojislav Šešelj, used insults to insult the personal dignity of political activist Aleksandra Jerkov and professors Tanasi Marinković and Miodrag Jovanović, thereby violating the media service provider's obligation to prohibit hate speech and violation of personal dignity (content shown on April 26<sup>th</sup>).

- Violations of the ban on the publication of political advertising in central news programmes (content shown from May 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>).

- Violations of the obligations of the media service provider related to the election campaign, when the State Secretary in the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, Đorđe Dabić, was enabled to promote the electoral list he supports in the role of a state official (content shown on May 3<sup>rd</sup>).

**Against Pančevo television for the following reasons:**

- Presentation of content within the information show "Brze vesti" in which an extremely negative campaign was conducted against the list holder and candidate Sava Manojlović, due to which the media service provider violated its obligations in relation to the election campaign and obligations to ensure the right to truthful, objective, complete and timely information (content shown on May 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>).

- Violation of the obligations of the media service provider related to the election campaign, when in the features shown on May 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, as part of the election programme, it was reported about the visit of the mayor of Pančevo to the construction of a new building of the Pančevo high school, the installation of a new children's playground, which she officially visited city manager, as well as the renovation of the ceremonial hall of the House of Culture in Banatsko Novi Selo, which was also attended by public officials.

- Presentation of a feature in the show “Velike vesti” which is marked as an election programme, in which the participation of children in the programme was abused for political purposes and showing the activities of a public official, who is also a candidate on the declared election list, which violated the obligations of the media service provider related to the election campaign and violated the ban on the abuse of the participation of minors in the political purposes programme (content shown on May 22<sup>nd</sup>).

**One complaint was filed against Studio B television for the following reason:**

- The presentation of a feature within the information programme “Brze vesti” in which the holder of the list and candidate in the elections, Savo Manojlović, was subjected to extremely negative criticism, which violated the obligations of the media service provider related to the election campaign and the obligation to provide true, objective, complete and timely information (content shown on May 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>).

**One complaint was filed against Informer TV for the following reason:**

- The presentation of a report in the news show “Kolegijum” in which the holder of the list and candidate in the elections, Savo Manojlović, was subjected to extremely negative criticism, which violated the obligations of the media service provider related to the election campaign and the obligation to provide true, objective, complete and timely information (content shown on May 14<sup>th</sup>).

## Methodology

As an independent domestic observation mission, CRTA monitors the entire election process for the election of councillors of the City of Belgrade Assembly on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, according to international standards for non-partisan and impartial election observation, namely the Declaration on Principles for International Election Observation,<sup>150</sup> Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, Declaration on Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation by Civil Organisations<sup>151</sup> and the Code of Conduct for Non-Partisan Observers.

The election observation methodology includes three periods: before the election day (long-term observation), election day observation (short-term observation) and the period after the election day. The observation methodology during each phase enables the CRTA Observation Mission to

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<sup>150</sup> National Democratic Institute, “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers”, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005, <https://link.crt.rs/nc>

<sup>151</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, <https://link.crt.rs/nd>



collect and process relevant information on a daily basis about the campaign that was conducted for the election of councillors of the City Assembly of the City of Belgrade.

### *Long-term observation of elections*

The long-term observation team has almost 50 members that observes and analyses the legal framework, election administration, all phases of the election process until the election day – including the process of candidacy, determination of polling stations, movement and conclusion of the number of voters, etc., campaign on the ground and in the media, reports to the public based on observation findings and provides legal support to citizens to exercise their rights.

The legal team of the CRTA Observation Mission monitors all sessions of the City Electoral Commission of the City of Belgrade. This approach 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 determination of final results.

A special team for long-term observation of elections on the ground monitors the activities of political parties, activities of local authorities and top public officials. A team of 14 observers collects data by monitoring social networks, visiting events and conversing with citizens, representatives of institutions and other relevant actors. From the announcement of the elections to the end of April, CRTA's observers recorded over 2,000 activities of political parties, government representatives and the highest public officials in Belgrade. CRTA's team of long-term observers on the ground conducted more than 70 interviews with citizens and other relevant actors.

Media monitoring of the CRTA Observation Mission implies monitoring the representation of various political actors and the manner of reporting on political actors. In the period from April 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024, CRTA's observers analysed more than 2,750 minutes of the central news programmes of five television stations with national coverage. The goal is to understand the presence and quality 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, observe the central news of television with national coverage: RTS 1, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy and TV B92.

The representation of political actors is measured by recording the basic unit – the second devoted to each political actor by each observed television. The tonality of political actors is determined on a three-level scale from negative to positive. A negative tonality encompasses attacking or hostile or unfavourable coverage of a political actor, a neutral tonality a presentation of facts without attacking or affirmative reporting, while a positive tonality includes affirmative and supportive coverage of a political actor. The number seconds that political actors had in active and passive roles were also 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, speakers, presenters or other programme participants talk about the political actor. You can read the detailed methodology of media monitoring on the CRTA's website.<sup>152</sup>

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

For more information, contact Jovana Đurbabić at e-mail: [jovana.djurbabic@crt.rs](mailto:jovana.djurbabic@crt.rs)

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<sup>152</sup> Crta, "Methodology of political pluralism media monitoring", <https://link.crt.rs/3c>