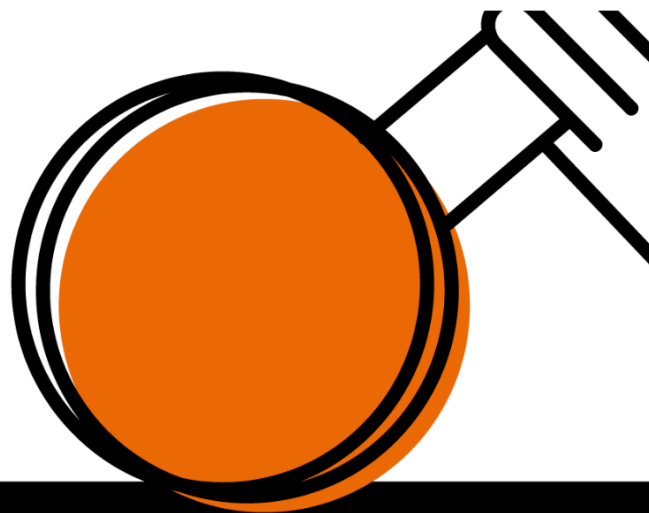


CRTA:



BELGRADE ELECTIONS 2024

Final Election Observation Report

Summary

1. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1. Evaluation of the Election

The elections for the members of the Assembly of the City of Belgrade, held on June 2, 2024, were marked by a decline in electoral integrity and quality, the rule of law, and the democratic capacity of society. Due to the boycott by a part of the opposition and a record low turnout, the lowest in the past 16 years, with 200,000 fewer voters compared to December 2023, the legitimacy of these elections remains questionable, although they've resulted in a majority that was more than sufficient for a new city Council. The results emerged from the electoral process that was far below democratic standards.

The legal framework for conducting elections can be assessed as compliant with the requirements of democratically organized societies, which is necessary but insufficient for a good electoral process. The inter-party dialogue on improving electoral conditions, which occurred, bafflingly, alongside the election campaign, did not result in a better environment for the June elections.

CRTA's observation mission noted **the spread of previously known election practices, which systematically influenced voters' will, created an illusion of pluralism, and seized the electoral infrastructure in favor of ruling parties. This again confirms that the line between the state and ruling parties is all but erased.** Electoral engineering was once again documented, used to abuse and undermine electoral rules. Due to electoral engineering combined with a lack of accountability, **the June elections cannot be considered free and fair.**

Since the announcement of these elections, **CRTA has emphasized that these elections must be viewed as a continuation of the December elections - those that were severely compromised by proven manipulation of the electoral will of the citizens of Belgrade, first and foremost, through illegal and illegitimate electoral engineering.**

In this context, election day on June 2nd can be seen as the second, slightly less egregious half of a match that was played in a dramatically dirty manner in its first part on December 17th. However, in terms of the number and types of irregularities and individual incidents, especially bearing in mind recorded cases of voting secrecy violations at every third polling station in Belgrade, vote-buying, and tense situations that even led to violence, the quality of election day was worse than, for example, the Belgrade elections held just over two years ago, on April 3, 2022, or the Belgrade elections held on March 4, 2018.

The decline in quality is clearer when considering the entire electoral process, not just election day. All chronic problems that have plagued elections for many years continued to grow and became normalized - from the fact that, as citizens, we cannot trust the voter register, to the extreme media inequality of election participants, the abuse of state institutions and public resources, and the intensification of pressure on voters.

These elections did not contribute to restoring citizens' trust in the electoral process.

Main features of the election campaign:

- The campaign for local elections was **overshadowed by a national campaign focused on the “defense of national interest”**. It unfolded in an environment where the **distinctions between the dominant party and state institutions, especially the institution of the president, were almost completely erased**. Local issues were neglected in favor of imposed "existential" questions about the survival of the nation (especially in light of the vote on the UN Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica). Widespread voter pressures, electoral corruption, abuse of state resources, and extreme media inequality are the essential features of these Belgrade elections.
- **Despite proven severe manipulations of the voters’ register in the previous election cycle, and although a comprehensive audit of the voters’ registry was one of ODIHR's priority recommendations¹, and insistence of the Serbian Government on its commitment to implementing ODIHR recommendations², the elections proceeded without an effective audit of the voters’ registry. The perpetrators of voters’ registry abuses remained protected by the principle of impunity** for election-related criminal acts. Under pressure from civil society representatives and part of the opposition, a legal provision was adopted as a **short-term measure, returning citizens who changed their residence in the last 11 months to their previous polling places on the voters' registry**. Unfortunately, CRTA, as a part of the working group overseeing the implementation of this measure, found that it **was not implemented fully or in good faith**. On election day, June 2, voter migrations from other territories to Belgrade were not as visible as in December, but due to unaddressed problems and incomplete implementation of the new legal provision, public trust in the validity of the basic document for conducting elections was again lacking. This is evidenced by the fact that CRTA was contacted by around 1,000 Belgrade citizens regarding these elections, with almost every other citizen reporting problems and seeking advice regarding the voters’ registry. **Elections conducted with an inaccurate voters’ registry, susceptible to manipulation by corrupt elements of the state apparatus, cannot reflect the true electoral will of the citizens.**
- **Attempts at organized voter migrations were recorded this time within Belgrade - between city municipalities**. A measure by the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, introduced without public oversight, allowed voting in local elections for the Belgrade City Assembly based on the secondary residence for the first time. It was used to transfer almost 500 voters from one city municipality to another

¹ Priority Recommendation #4: To address concerns over the accuracy of voter lists and increase public confidence, the relevant laws, regulations, and practices should be reconsidered to enable access to voter registration data and facilitate the conduct of a meaningful audit of the Unified Voter Register with the participation of relevant stakeholders, including political parties and civil society, in line with data protection standards.

²“We continue to work with ODIHR and on the implementation of all recommendations in accordance with the practices we introduced in Serbia in 2019, since the establishment of the Government of Serbia Working Group for Cooperation with ODIHR. Do we agree with everything stated in this report? Certainly not. But we continue to work on implementing the recommendations, she stated. The Prime Minister reiterated that our country is committed to cooperation with ODIHR, and that we have invited the observation mission of this office to come and observe the local elections, which are to be held in Serbia later this year.” - Beograd, 28. February 2024. <https://link.crt.rs/rm>

during the 20 days it was in effect before being withdrawn due to reactions from CRTA and part of the public. The analysis found that every fourth voter was transferred to the same polling station - Zemun 26. Almost all of them voted "from home". There are grounds to claim that the majority of these voters voted for the ruling party's electoral list.

- This is the third campaign in the past two years during which **major changes to polling station territories in Belgrade were carried out non-transparently**, without clear criteria or public information. This raises suspicion that the real reason for the changes was not to reduce crowding at polling stations but to facilitate manipulation of voters, as identified in previous election processes. Confusion among voters was also created, as it was noted on election day that voters could not find themselves on the voters' registry at almost every fifth polling station in Belgrade.
- This is the third campaign in the past two years during which **major changes to polling station territories in Belgrade were carried out non-transparently, without clear criteria or public information**. This raises suspicion that the real reason for the changes was not to reduce congestion at polling stations but to facilitate the manipulation of voters, as identified in previous election processes. There was confusion among voters, as many of them could not find themselves on the voters' registry, at almost every fifth polling station in Belgrade.
- **Political actors of questionable authenticity once again found their place on the ballot under suspicious circumstances**. Ruling parties benefited from such actors as they assured easier control over the work of the City Election Commission and polling boards. The nomination phase, as in previous election cycles, raised well-founded doubts about the validity of the citizen support signatures necessary for the election lists to be approved, i.e. the way they were collected and certified, as well as indications of the misuse of citizens' personal data. Additional doubts were raised by the participation of minority parties with significant populist potential, whose minority status had previously been contested by the election administration, but who were once again allowed to participate in the Belgrade elections.

Main features of election day:

- **In terms of the type and prevalence of the most frequent incidents, election day on June 2 was not significantly better than December 17. Voting results were compromised at 14 percent of polling stations**, far greater contamination than any election day (except December 17) that CRTA's observation mission has monitored since 2016, clearly indicating a threat to voting freedom.
- CRTA conducted an analysis of vote distribution by turnout and voting patterns by place of residence, **identifying a minimum of eight thousand additional votes in favor of the ruling party's electoral list**. The determined number somewhat corresponds to the increase in the number of voters who voted outside their polling station.
- Suspicions of **manipulations related to remote voting (voting from home)** were expressed. In these elections, 35 percent more voters voted "from home" than six months ago, and this increased number can be linked to better electoral results for the

list Aleksandar Vučić - Belgrade Tomorrow. At polling stations where more than 10 percent of voters voted from home, that list achieved 10 percent better results compared to its average performance.

- **Blurring lines between the state and the party also affected the work of polling boards in Belgrade.** Instead of ensuring the proper implementation of laws, protecting voting secrecy, and ensuring free elections, polling board members used access to voters' registry extracts for keeping party records and estimating the number of voters to bring to the polls. At 12 percent of polling stations, parallel records of voters were kept, contrary to the law.
- There are concerns about a widespread practice of **"correcting" polling board records after election day**, often justified by the weak capacities of the polling boards. There are reports of the corrections serving to change election results in municipal elections in Belgrade, as well as in some other cities in Serbia, in **favor of non-authentic election actors**.

1.2. The course of the election campaign

The elections for the members of the Assembly of the City of Belgrade were called on the last day of the legal deadline - April 3, 2024. It was determined that the campaign would span the full legal limit of 60 days so that the elections could be held on June 2. As the end of the campaign for the Belgrade Assembly elections approached, the intensity of pre-election activities increased, but so did the trend of blending local policy issues with national themes, promoted by the top state officials. The public's expectations that the inter-party dialogue on improving electoral conditions, which took place parallel to the campaign, would affect the quality of the conditions for the Belgrade elections were not met. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (ODIHR) also observed the Belgrade elections, marking the first time this international mission had observed local elections in Serbia since 2002.

The strongest ruling party began its campaign for the Belgrade elections even before the elections were called, but the fact that the responsible institutions showed no intention of ending the practice of impunity for criminal offenses in the electoral process was used by part of the pro-European opposition bloc as an argument for deciding to boycott these elections. **Thus, the first part of the campaign was marked by divisions over the boycott issue between former opposition allies and the already established blurring of the line between the state and the party.**

The inter-party dialogue on improving electoral conditions and implementing ODIHR recommendations was halted before it could produce significant results. A political agreement was reached on the necessary measure to amend the Law on the Unified Voters' registry so that voters who changed their municipality of residence from July 2023 would exercise their voting right on June 2, 2024, in their previous municipality (if local elections were held there). Besides this, no steps were taken toward common positions on possible law and public policy proposals for a better electoral process and fulfillment of ODIHR recommendations.

The Parliamentary Working Group for Improving the Electoral Process was supposed to take a unified stance on proposals for legal and by-law changes that could affect the June 2 elections by May 20. This did not happen due to the refusal of members from the ruling majority to comment on the proposed solutions.

The new election cycle began without fulfilling ODIHR's priority recommendation for an independent audit of the voter's registry. In the publicly available data from the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government (MSALSG) on the number of voters in the Unified Voter's Registry, drastic deviations and inexplicable trends were observed - stagnation in Belgrade and a decrease in the number of voters in other regions. **CRTA's observation mission found that in Serbia, the number of voters per polling station for parliamentary elections decreased by 226,798 by the end of April compared to the December 17 elections.**

New doubts were raised by **contradictory information provided by MSALSG**. When CRTA's observation mission first informed the public in April about significant and inexplicable changes in the voters' registry, the ministry denied CRTA's findings, responding with data that did not align with even the aggregate numbers of voters per municipality in the quarterly reports published by MSALSG.

Additionally, in the second half of April, MSALSG quietly introduced the possibility of voting in municipal or city elections, based on secondary residence, without informing the public. Due to the way the change was introduced and the lack of educational and informational campaigns for citizens, the purpose of this change was unclear, raising suspicion that it was an attempt to transfer voters from one polling station to another within Belgrade. Following reactions from CRTA and part of the public, it was agreed at a meeting of the Parliamentary Collegium that this change would be withdrawn, which happened on May 11. Further monitoring of election preparations and election day, **CRTA found that 500 voters were moved to new polling stations using the amended provision of the Instruction before it was withdrawn and that this was indeed an illegitimate attempt to migrate voters between city municipalities, based on the analysis of voting results at those polling stations.**

During this period, polling stations in Belgrade were also reorganized, increasing their number by 85 compared to the previous elections. In this regard, the **City Election Commission cited the implementation of ODIHR's recommendation to reduce the size of polling stations to avoid crowding, without providing the public with information on the criteria for forming new polling stations.**

A total of 14 electoral lists were nominated in these elections. To be nominated, at least 3,000 certified statements of voter support had to be submitted, while the total number of submitted support signatures for all lists exceeded 59,000. **The electoral lists mainly certified their signatures in municipal administrations, with only 22 percent certified by public notaries.**

The nomination process, concluded on May 12, was again marked by **allegations of obstructions in collecting support signatures for candidacy**, as several opposition

candidates reported the unavailability of certifiers. Additionally, there were **reports of at least one falsified statement of voter support**, for the electoral list of the Greek national minority "Belgrade Our City." **Doubts also arose regarding supplementing the missing voter support statements** for the electoral list "We Voice of the People," as such statements were collected and certified in a very short time.

Belgrade City Electoral Commission (CEC) operated in accordance with the law and within legal deadlines. CEC improved transparency compared to last year's election process by introducing video broadcasts of sessions. **Most decisions were adopted unanimously.** The Commission also decided on two complaints - one was dismissed, and the other was rejected.

The campaign's final phase was plagued by chronic electoral problems - **blurred line between the state and the ruling parties, pressures on voters, and abuse of public resources for party campaign purposes.**

The election campaign, dominated by the ruling party's list in terms of activities and the support given by top state and city officials, gave the impression of **national or presidential elections rather than a race for city assembly mandates.** The main narrative of the campaign, promoted even before the elections were called, presented the Belgrade elections as a matter of the nation's future and survival, 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 the parallel state campaign conducted under the guise of national issues with the slogan "Serbia Tomorrow," and messages like "We are not a genocidal people" signed by "Serbia and Srpska," is also evident in CRTA's observation mission finding that the same messages conveyed at state activities were also transmitted at the ruling party's election rallies. CRTA's observation mission recorded more than 300 campaign activities across Belgrade during the campaign until May 27, with high-ranking public officials making a total of 700 appearances. The primary focus of appearances was precisely the messages that presented 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 electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić - Belgrade Tomorrow." Vučić, in this capacity and as the President of the Republic of Serbia, was by far the most dominant figure in the media, with over 58 live broadcasts on the most influential televisions during the 60-day campaign and double the airtime in prime news compared to all other election actors combined.

In Belgrade, CRTA observers recorded **125 events with elements of public resource abuse** - from using institutional symbols in promotional videos, using vehicles and premises of public institutions, to engaging public sector employees in promotional party activities.

More than 70 interlocutors from CRTA's observation mission in Belgrade reported voter pressures they experienced or witnessed. The findings of these conversations show that political pressures in the campaign for the Belgrade elections have been normalized to the extent that both political actors and citizens themselves see them as an inevitable part of the election season. Testimonies describe an atmosphere of fear, in which citizens

rarely decide to report pressures, as they lack trust in institutions and their readiness to provide protection. **Employees in public utility companies, municipal administrations, preschools and schools, gerontological centers, and associations of people with disabilities** testified about pressures and fear.

CRTA's observation mission documented a **concerning incident of child exploitation during the campaign**, where a Belgrade preschool institution brought children to a performance featuring political messages from the ruling party and its electoral list. Of particular concern are reports indicating that parties in Belgrade **targeted individuals from socially vulnerable groups, as well as households with outstanding debts for public utility services.**

The elections for the capital city and local city policy issues were sidelined in the most influential media in Serbia, which CRTA systematically monitored. **Additionally, the most influential media - RTS 1, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy, and TV B92 - demonstrated** extremely unequal treatment of representatives of the ruling and opposition electoral lists. Monitoring findings show almost absolute dominance of ruling representatives in prime-time news, **with an average presence of 94 percent of the time.**

During the campaign, **political party activists reported being subjected to physical and verbal attacks, with the highest number recorded in the second half of the campaign.**

The Anti-Corruption Agency's actions were noticeably slower than in previous election cycles, although legal provisions prescribe handling complaints within short deadlines of five days. CRTA recorded that actors subject to complaints delayed sending responses to the Agency, preventing effective action within the deadlines. **The Agency's first actions were registered only in the last weeks of the election campaign**, despite complaints being submitted by CRTA's observation mission in the second half of April.

On the other hand, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media **did not adopt a monitoring plan for media behavior during the campaign, nor did it submit reports on how these obligations were fulfilled, despite adopting rules during the campaign that regulate these behaviors more closely and obligating commercial media.** REM did not take action or appropriate measures even after receiving complaints, and the lack of timely and effective responses to attacks on media workers during the election campaign in the programs of media service providers is particularly concerning.

CRTA **filed 75 complaints for violations and neglect of the law** during the Belgrade elections, a number close to the complaints filed in December when parliamentary elections, also monitored by the Crta Observation Mission, were held in parallel with the Belgrade elections.

- **CRTA submitted 38 complaints against media coverage available to the Belgrade public to the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media.** Despite numerous complaints indicating law violations by media houses, REM initiated only one procedure,

which had not been concluded by the closing date of the final CRTA Observation Mission report.

- **CRTA filed 37 complaints with the Anti-Corruption Agency for cases of abuse of public office (9), as well as unauthorized party activities in the campaign and misuse of public resources (28).** Although the Agency did act on these complaints in this election process and identified violations in many cases, the fact that these are recurring violations from campaign to campaign suggests that the sanctions imposed by the Agency do not influence political actors to change their behavior, namely to cease abusing their office and public resources for promoting a political party during campaigns.

CRTA, along with 14 other civil society organizations, signed a request to the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection to conduct an immediate inspection of the work of ruling parties and other political organizations due to suspicion of illegal processing of citizens' personal data.

1.3. Election Day Process and Outcome

The snap local elections in Belgrade were held on June 2, 2024. A total of **1,602,150 citizens registered** in the voters' registry were eligible to vote at **1,265 polling stations**.

Based on results collected from polling stations from a random and representative sample of 450 polling stations, Belgrade recorded a **turnout of 46.2 percent** (with a margin of error of 0.5 percent). This turnout is 12 percentage points lower than the turnout recorded in the December elections when 58.3 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots (margin of error 0.4 percent). **The data shows that on June 2, 200,000 fewer voters exercised their right to vote. The turnout in the Belgrade elections in June 2024 was the lowest in the last 16 years.**

According to the final analysis of CRTA's observation mission, the voting results were compromised at 14 percent (177) of polling stations in Belgrade. The prevalence and intensity of incidents at these polling stations **primarily threatened the freedom of voting.** Although these events cannot put into doubt the victory of the strongest list, due to the compromised voters' registry and the nature of the recorded mechanisms controlling the will of voters on election day, **the elections cannot be considered free and fair.**

The intensity of vote control on June 2 is particularly worrying, which was ensured both outside and inside the polling stations, primarily through vote-buying, collecting evidence of voting, and organized voter coercion. **At every third polling station in Belgrade (33 percent),** there were violations of voting secrecy, mainly due to **photographing ballots in voting booths (29 percent of polling stations).** Unlawful parallel records inside polling stations were noted at **12 percent of polling stations.** Third parties conducting surveillance or participating in the work of polling boards were present at **5 percent of polling stations** in Belgrade.

Irregularities related to voter identity verification were recorded at **30 percent of polling stations** in Belgrade. At **22 percent of polling stations**, procedures for checking whether a voter had previously voted were not consistently followed, while at **5 percent of polling stations**, voter identity was not checked. At an additional **14 percent of polling stations**, it was recorded that **voters did not vote personally**. At **1 percent of polling stations**, cases were recorded where a single voter inserted more than one ballot into the ballot box.

At **19 percent of polling stations**, voters could not be found in the voters' registry. This can at least partly be explained by poor communication of state authorities regarding changes in the territory covered by polling stations and changes in the Law on the Unified Voter's Registry in the weeks before election day. Situations where a **polling board member or voter noticed deceased persons in the voters' registry excerpt** were recorded at **4 percent of polling stations**. The same percentage of polling stations noted cases where a **voter was registered, but someone else signed in their place**.

On election day, patterns of seemingly isolated incidents were observed. Various control and pressure mechanisms on voters were seen near polling stations, which CRTA's observation mission warned about in long-term observation reports - **from vehicles circling polling stations throughout the day, organized voter transportation to polling stations, gatherings in front of polling stations, and the presence of third parties at polling stations**.

Mobile observer teams had the most field outings based on information about vote-buying and suspicions of organized voter transportation. There were 36 cases monitored by CRTA observers throughout the day.

Logistics and call centers were observed at several locations in Belgrade (such as facilities in Senjak, Sarajevska Street, Banjica, Vračar, New Belgrade, Surčin). Some of these centers were near polling stations, in catering facilities (restaurants, pizzerias, bakeries), private houses, and public enterprise premises, at stadiums, and in unmarked facilities. Similar behavior of activists and voters was seen everywhere: people directing voters to polling stations and, after voting, voters heading to mentioned party centers.

In front of many observed polling stations, vehicles, including those with license plates from Bosnia and Herzegovina, were seen transporting voters. **Coordinated and organized voter transportation visibly involved minority communities, primarily the Roma community** (cases were recorded in the municipalities of Surčin, Palilula, Lazarevac, Stari Grad, New Belgrade, and Mladenovac).

Organized transportation was accompanied by parallel voter records and vote-buying cases. CRTA's observation mission filed **eight reports of electoral corruption with the police** on election day - seven reports of vote-buying suspicion and one for "circular voting". This is more reports than in December last year when CRTA filed seven reports of this type of electoral corruption across Serbia, two of which related to Belgrade.

On election day, about 500 citizens contacted CRTA's observation mission, reporting various irregularities they noticed at polling stations and in their vicinity and seeking legal advice on exercising and protecting their voting rights.

In terms of the type and prevalence of the most frequent incidents, election day on June 2 was no better than election day on December 17. (Table 1)

Tabela 1. Percentage (%) of polling stations in the Belgrade elections in December 2023 and June 2024 with recorded individual types of incidents.

	Jun 2024	December 2023
Secrecy of the vote compromised inside the polling station (photographing ballots, suggesting to voters whom to vote for, recording activities at the polling station)	33%	7%
Maintaining parallel records inside polling stations	12%	7%
The presence of third parties inside the polling station	5%	5%
Procedures for verifying whether a voter had previously voted not consistently followed	22%	17%
Voters did not vote in person	14%	12%
The identity of voters not verified	5%	3%
One voter inserting several ballots into the ballot box	1%	1%
Voters who were not found in the voter register	19%	20%
Deceased persons found in the voters' registry	4%	N/A ³
Someone signed in the voters' registry excerpt instead of the voter	4%	5%
Voters with valid documents and listed in the voter register who were not allowed to vote	1%	1%
Voters not listed in the voter register voting	0.4%	1%
Threats or pressures directed at CRTA observers at the polling station	3%	2%
Threats or pressures towards voters or members of the election commission	1%	1%

³ During the monitoring of the December elections, CRTA determined that the voters' registry was not up-to-date and contained deceased individuals. Therefore, it was decided that this irregularity would also be systematically monitored in the following election cycles.

1.4. Preconditions and Recommendations for Better Elections

1.4.1. Preconditions for Discussion on Better Elections

As with the December 17 elections, Crta's observation mission believes that improving the legal framework and electoral practices is not possible without the prerequisites that would guarantee the establishment of elections as the foundation of democratic governance and the rule of law. **The key indicators that would show political readiness to achieve this goal include combating legal impunity, neglect, and violations of laws in elections; a thorough revision of the voter registry with an independent control mechanism ensuring its integrity, accuracy, and future updates; and creating an environment for objective, impartial, and timely reporting and promoting pluralism of political ideas in the media, especially in public media services.**

1. Establishing timely and non-selective accountability for election law violations.

Combating impunity is a fundamental prerequisite for establishing the rule of law and improving citizens' trust in Serbian institutions. Reestablishing that state bodies and public institutions are there to protect the laws and interests of the state and the public within their competencies, ethical standards, and professional service, not allowing any party or private interest to override this obligation.

- *Establish responsibility for the prosecution's lack of action in the electoral process and selective handling of citizens' complaints. Call for criminal and disciplinary accountability of leaders in the Basic Public Prosecutor's offices in Belgrade, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, and the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, for abuse of official position and failure to use their authority to control and supervise the work of lower public prosecutor's offices.*
- *The prosecution must urgently and non-selectively engage in determining the truth and responsibility for election law violations, including acts committed under the auspices of Serbian state institutions, primarily in the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government (including the Administrative Inspectorate), as well as in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Consulate General in Banja Luka.*
- *State institutions, bodies, and institutions must initiate disciplinary proceedings and use all internal control mechanisms against officials who irresponsibly, unauthorizedly, and illegally intervened in the voters' registry, changed citizens' residences, and committed other abuses of position.*

- *Notaries who participated in falsifying voter support statements for the candidacy of electoral lists and individuals who unauthorizedly handled voters' personal data must be urgently prosecuted.*
- *Relevant public prosecutors must initiate proceedings to determine the criminal responsibility of police station officials who abused their official position by making residence changes contrary to predefined obligations and procedures.*
- *In accordance with Article 158 of the Criminal Code, relevant public prosecutors must initiate criminal proceedings against those responsible for compiling inaccurate voters' registry.*
- *The Administrative Inspectorate must file a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings against anyone responsible for maintaining and updating the voters' registry who did not ensure its accuracy and timeliness.*
- *In the National Assembly, it is necessary to initiate proceedings for the dismissal of all eight members of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media due to irregular and irresponsible conduct and simultaneously announce a public call for proposing candidates for the election of new Council members.*
- *Upon the establishment of a new composition of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, conduct a process to determine any violations of obligations or non-compliance with conditions specified in the license for media service providers to whom REM issues licenses for broadcasting, and in case of violations, take legally prescribed measures, including revocation of the license.*
- *The management boards of public media services, selected by the new composition of the REM Council, should initiate procedures for the dismissal of general directors and chief and responsible editors of the news programs and conduct competitions to fill these positions with individuals who will fulfill their obligations in accordance with the law and the principles of public media services.*

2. An accurate and uncompromised voter registry is a crucial prerequisite for holding democratic elections since without it, the voters' will on election day cannot be determined. The negative perception of the voter registry by a significant part of the public is rooted in the lack of timely and sufficient information about its status. As in previous electoral processes, voter registry remains a source of public distrust in the electoral process. The key problem in the electoral process concerning the voter registry is its inaccuracy, further affected by migration, or "relocation" of voters proven in the December 2023 elections, and its lack of timely updating. Manipulating the voters' registry to conduct voter migrations, i.e., illegal and illegitimate electoral engineering, is most significant in the context of local elections, while the lack of updating is a recurring

problem from election to election. Regardless of potential effects, the amendment to the Law on the Unified Voter Registry, which stipulated that citizens who changed residence after July 3, 2023, can vote only at their previous address, cannot represent a permanent solution to existing voters' registry problems and requires consideration of a long-term measure.

- *It is necessary to legally establish an independent commission involving international and domestic experts to conduct a review of the voters' registry in accordance with international standards and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Following the determination of factual findings, immediate steps should be taken to compile an accurate voter registry and establish mechanisms to ensure its integrity.*

3. Significant improvements are needed in the professional standards of Radio-Television Serbia and Radio-Television Vojvodina so that these institutions function as public media services for Serbian citizens. The free formation of voters' will, as the cornerstone of free elections, largely depends on truthful, complete, and timely information and encouraging the pluralism of political ideas in electronic media. The initial step towards fostering political pluralism in the media is to open public media services RTS and RTV to diverse political perspectives and substantially enhance their commitment to providing objective and timely information and education to citizens.

1.4.2. Recommendations for Improving the Electoral Process After the June Elections

After meeting the preconditions, the following key recommendations should be fulfilled:

Recommendation 1: Reforming the Electoral Administration and Process

- *Professionalize the electoral administration.*
- *Establish an independent professional service within the Republic Electoral Commission.*
- *Expand the electoral administration's powers in the election process.*
- *Change the model for selecting members, both in the permanent and extended composition.*
- *Require that members of polling boards undergo training for conducting elections and pass a test for a license to perform this function.*
- *Allow accredited observers to submit complaints or requests to annul voting at a polling station.*
- *More thoroughly regulate the procedure for voting outside polling stations.*
- *Separate the nomination phase from the election campaign phase; the election campaign should start with the adoption of the consolidated electoral list.*

Recommendation 2: Establish Mechanisms to Prevent Future Misuse of Voter Support Signatures

- *Mandate that voter support signatures can only be collected through the e-Government portal.*
- *Enable voters to quickly and efficiently verify whether and to which electoral list they have signed a support statement.*

Recommendation 3: Improve the Prosecution's Work in the Electoral Process

- *To efficiently gather evidence, investigative bodies need the ability to apply special evidentiary actions for offenses against electoral rights under Chapter XV of the Criminal Code.*
- *Ensure efficient and objective handling by the prosecution through an impartial division of cases based on urgency, complexity, and type.*
- *Appeal to the Supreme Public Prosecutor to introduce the practice of issuing general mandatory instructions for elections.*

Recommendation 4: Increase Transparency of the Voter's Registry

- *Simplify the currently insufficient mechanism for accessing excerpts from the voter registry so that voters and election participants can obtain information relevant for possibly initiating criminal proceedings or protecting electoral rights.*
- *Make statistical data on the number of voters per household, by address, and by year of registration in the voter registry publicly available.*
- *Regularly publish and update all statistical data on registered and deregistered residences and address deactivations for adult citizens by the Ministry of Interior.*

Recommendation 5: Prohibit the Misuse of Public Functions and Resources for Campaign Purposes

- *Prohibit public officials at all levels from actively participating in public events promoting plans or results of public bodies, organizations, and services during the election campaign.*
- *Ban any promotional campaigns by all levels of government, including publicly-owned enterprises, during the campaign period.*

Recommendation 6: Ensure Promotion of Political Pluralism in Media Service Providers' Programs

- *Consider forming expert working groups to support public media services in aligning their reporting with the highest standards of professionalism and ethics and providing*

expert assistance in developing strategies and self-regulatory acts for regulating professional and impartial reporting on the activities and views of political actors.

- *Strengthen the general obligation to promote political pluralism in media service providers' programs outside the election campaign by allowing various political actors to express their views on topics of public interest.*
- *Ensure that public media services genuinely promote the pluralism of political ideas, in line with their role and legally prescribed obligations, including enhancing self-regulation, launching new programs, and increasing external oversight of fulfilling obligations.*
- *Amend the Electronic Media Law to establish clear criteria for determining the privileged position of public officials during the entire election campaign, applicable to officials who are simultaneously candidates and those who are prominent representatives of electoral lists or candidates' proposers.*
- *To specifically address serious violations of the Law on Electronic Media, include unilateral attacks on election candidates and prolonged or repeated campaigns against candidates without relevant factual basis.*
- *Improve the monitoring mechanism for programs, reporting on supervision findings, and procedures for handling complaints during the election process.*
- *Introduce a comprehensive system for monitoring political pluralism in media service providers' programs outside the election campaign.*

CRTA's specific recommendations from election cycles observed since 2016 are systematized on the "**CRTA Recommendations**"⁴ page and must be read together through all reports, including the **Final Report on the Observation of the December 17, 2023**⁵, Elections and the Report on the Observation of the June 2, 2024, Elections presented here.

During the June elections in Belgrade, CRTA's observation mission also prepared contributions for the parallel inter-party dialogue on electoral conditions and reform held in the National Assembly. CRTA sent specific proposals three times to the National Assembly and the established Working Group for Improving the Electoral Process, in accordance with its recommendations⁶:

- April 11, 2024: **Written contribution to the implementation process of ODIHR recommendations;**
- April 12, 2024: **Proposals on the further work on the implementation of ODIHR recommendations;**
- May 7, 2024: **Contribution to the work of the Working Group for Improving the Electoral Process** with priorities for the June 2 local elections.

CRTA also sent comments on proposals for establishing the electoral reform process in the Assembly and attended all meetings of the National Assembly Collegium and Working Group between April 11 and May 20, 2024.

⁴ CRTA Recommendations, <https://link.crtars/r/>

⁵ CRTA Observation Mission, Final Election Observation Report 17. December, <https://link.crtars/r/>

⁶ CRTA, What did CRTA propose to the National Assembly regarding electoral conditions?, <https://link.crtars/rf>

The Parliamentary Working Group for Improving the Electoral Process was supposed to adopt a unified stance on proposed legal and by-law changes that could affect the June 2 elections by May 20. **This did not happen due to the refusal of members from the ruling majority to comment on the proposed solutions.**