

IN EFFECT, DO WE ELECT IMAMO LI IZBORA



Report

Discussion Table: **Ensuring Voter Registry Integrity**

Conference: [“In effect, do we elect?”](#)
October 24, 2024

The materials used in the roundtable discussion can be found [here](#).

The roundtable discussion titled “*Ensuring Voter Registry integrity*” focused on potential solutions for conducting a full review of the voter register in the Republic of Serbia, following the latest ODIHR recommendations. The discussion was closed to the public.

Participants emphasized that the only way to restore public trust in the voter register is through a comprehensive review, followed by measures to ensure its continued integrity. The working group agreed on the need to establish an independent body responsible for conducting the review and preserving the integrity of the voter register (a commission).

The panel addressed the following issues:

- The commission’s mandate and duration for conducting the voter register review
- Composition and appointment of the commission for voter register review
- Authority and access to relevant databases for the voter register review
- Best practices for voter register transparency
- Ensuring the accuracy and timeliness of the voter register

I. Commission Mandate

The commission must continue its oversight role even after the initial review. There was strong agreement that the voter register review should not be seen as a one-time process. To maintain the integrity achieved through a full review, mechanisms must be established to ensure accurate and regular updates, checks of registries (such as civil records and residency registers), and periodic controls. To ensure lasting integrity, the commission’s mandate should include the ability to conduct oversight for an extended period or even continuously after the initial comprehensive review.

France was highlighted as an example, where ad hoc commissions are formed nationwide three weeks before each election to verify the accuracy of the voter register in their municipalities. The involvement of the judiciary in voter register oversight was also discussed.

II. Commission Composition

To restore public trust in the voter register, it is essential to ensure representation of all relevant stakeholders in the commission's work and prevent unilateral decision-making through simple voting majorities. Inclusivity was identified as a critical factor for the commission's independence, with representatives from political parties, civil society, independent experts, and even international experts equally included.

Additionally, the commission's independence would be guaranteed by a decision-making mechanism that prevents political voting imbalances. An alternative model was discussed using North Macedonia, where the Central Election Commission, a permanent and professional electoral administration, manages voter register oversight, ensuring timely updates and independent operations.

III. Access to Databases

For a comprehensive voter register review, the commission must have access to all relevant databases. Conducting a security audit of the software used in the voter register was also deemed essential.

There was broad agreement on the necessity for access to databases, including the citizen residency register, birth, death, and marriage records, census data, and other relevant sources. Addressing the issue of administrative voter migration, examples from France were cited, where ad hoc commissions access multiple databases to verify voter residency accurately. The conclusion was that state bodies should provide the commission with all necessary data to establish the voter register's true status and enable further monitoring.

It was emphasized that, during the review, it is crucial to ensure the security of the software environment for the voter register and connected population registries to prevent unauthorized access or data manipulation.

IV. Voter Register Transparency

To restore trust in the voter register, citizens should have broad access to it, balanced with the protection of personal data.

There was strong agreement that voter register transparency is key to building trust. A negative example cited was Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Central Election Commission does not publish the voter register online despite its obligation, instead providing extracts to political parties, leading to potential misuse.

Participants noted that the best practices allow citizens and political actors to contribute to voter register verification. North Macedonia allows political parties to review the voter register and raise objections, while France enables each voter to check information on all voters in their municipality's register. While different transparency models exist, it is essential to ensure the voter register is publicly accessible and subject to oversight in a manner that allows independent control by citizens, civil society, and political actors, while also protecting personal data.

V. Voter Register Accuracy

To achieve an accurate voter register, new maintenance mechanisms must be established, enabling citizen oversight, improved linkage of population registries, and verification of citizens residing abroad or with dual citizenship.

Participants agreed that voter register (in)accuracy significantly affects public trust in elections. Citizens often encounter inaccuracy when noticing an overly high number of registered voters. In Serbia, a challenge in maintaining an up-to-date register is the large number of citizens who have emigrated without deregistering. When such individuals pass away abroad, and authorities are not informed, they remain active voters on the register.

Examples of best practices from other countries, such as France, were provided, where registries are interconnected and automatically updated. Bilateral agreements with countries hosting large populations of French citizens notify France in case of a citizen's death. Ukraine has a similar mechanism to update its register with information from countries hosting many Ukrainian citizens.

It was concluded that this issue depends on both political culture and specific legal solutions—some countries use tax incentives to encourage citizens moving abroad to deregister. Additionally, other incentives like health insurance charges encourage citizens to deregister. Nonetheless, this issue extends beyond voter register review to the broader population registration system of a country's citizens abroad.

The issue of Bosnian citizens with dual Serbian citizenship who are eligible to vote in Serbian local elections without residing in those areas was specifically highlighted. This problem is linked to the legal requirement that a Serbian citizen must reside in Serbia to be listed in the voter register. It was concluded that a legal or bilateral solution is needed to prevent abuses of this rule.