

## Report on the programme for pre-electoral assistance to support the 2016 local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Document prepared by DGII

*Item to be considered by the GR-DEM at its meeting on 11 July 2017*

### Introduction

At their 1251<sup>st</sup> meeting of 16 March 2016, the Ministers' Deputies approved the Programme for electoral assistance to support the 2016 Local Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (GR-DEM(2016)4), building on the previous electoral assistance programmes implemented by the Council of Europe in BiH for the 12 October 2014 general elections and following preliminary contacts with the BiH authorities, civil society organisations and international partners.

The present document summarises the main outcomes of the assistance ahead of the local elections and indicates follow-up action(s) and/or result(s).

### Context

On 2 October 2016, local elections were held to elect 131 Mayors of Municipalities and 10 City Mayors in BiH, including 74 Municipal Councils and 4 City Councils in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as 57 Municipal Assemblies and 6 City Assemblies in the Republika Srpska. Additionally the elections of the Assembly of Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina were scheduled on the same day. The elections took place against a background of ethnic tensions following the referendum held in Republika Srpska on the 25 September 2016. Widespread political discourse focusing on ethnic issues, including nationalistic attitudes, was promoted during the electoral campaign.

With the exception of a few violent incidents, the voting was held in a calm and orderly manner.

A total of 1.782.831 eligible voters voted at the local elections (54.77%), out of which 53.78% were women.

In Mostar, due to unsuccessful negotiations between the political stakeholders, once again no elections were held.

The observers of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities noted improvements to the system of "tendered ballots" that had been reformed prior to the elections as was the amendment to the Election Law that provides for a 40% quota of the under-represented gender on candidates' lists for Municipal Councils.

With the exception of Srebrenica and Stolac, where the election had to be re-organised, according to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Election Day polling was, by and large, effectively managed by the Polling Station Commissions. The work of the Central Election Commission was qualified as professional.

<sup>1</sup> This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers.

## Implementation of the electoral assistance programme

Following the objectives and expected results identified in the programmatic co-operation document 2015-2017 for BiH, the Council of Europe programme for electoral assistance focused on four priorities:

1. Capacity-building of the electoral administration
2. Capacity-building of women candidates for mayor
3. Capacity-building of national minority candidates for mayor
4. Voters' awareness raising (focusing in particular on elderly voters)

The programme, which was mainly designed for pre-electoral assistance, also included components to be implemented after the elections, such as the post electoral conference and capacity building activities for elected female officials. The programme was implemented in close co-operation with the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CEC BiH), the Association of Election Officials (AEO BiH) and the civil society organisations Oneworld Platform and the Centre for Roma<sup>2</sup> "Romalen" Kakanj, which is a partner of the Council of Europe ROMED programme.

Throughout the programme, synergies were ensured with all stakeholders involved in the process and two official stakeholder roundtables were organised in the Council of Europe Office, Sarajevo. In order to draw attention to the need for greater participation of women in the public and political life, a nationwide awareness raising campaign was jointly implemented by the CEC BiH and the respective civil society organisations.

In order to avoid overlapping with existing co-operation activities and to seek complementarity of action, the Secretariat also had meetings with the EU-Delegation in BiH as well as with the OSCE Presence in Sarajevo before and during the implementation period to exchange views and information.

### 1. Capacity-building of the electoral administration

The main challenges identified in the previous election cycles referred to the unsatisfactory level of training of the members of the polling station committees. In this context one priority of the pre-electoral assistance programme of the Council of Europe was to create conditions for professional trainings for commissioners in order to ensure that key persons from the polling station committees have sound knowledge about the election process and their responsibilities.

#### Activity 1.1 Develop unified curriculum for the education of election administration in line with international standards

With the assistance of a Council of Europe expert, the CEC BiH developed a curriculum for the training of the election administration members, introducing new adult teaching methodologies, including theoretical and practical exercises, tests and the certification of training participants.

- **Tailor made training materials were created with unified templates for presentations, exercises and the training agenda.**

#### Activity 1.2 Training and certification of trainers for municipal and polling station election commissions of 142 municipalities (Target: 300 trainers)

283 candidates were trained and tested in 6 regional centres as trainers for the training of presidents and deputy presidents of the polling station committees.

- **199 participants successfully passed the test and were awarded with a certificate.** In order to reach the objective of having a total of 300 certified trainers, an additional training of trainers is foreseen in June 2017. This session will also include those participants who did not previously pass the test as well as some candidates who were on the reserve list for the first round.

<sup>2</sup> The terms "Roma and Travellers" are being used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "*Gens du voyage*", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

The selection of potential candidates for the training was done by municipal/city commissions via a public call. The candidates had to meet the requirements stipulated in the provisions of the Election Law of BiH. Preference was given to those who had experience in training of election commissions or polling station committees, and candidates who were eligible to apply for trainers in any basic constituency, regardless of the place of residence. To eliminate a possible conflict of interest, the applications of current members of the municipal/city election commissions were reviewed by separate municipal commissions.

- **Out of a total of 463 potential candidates, 283 candidates were selected.**

#### Activity 1.3. Training and certification of presidents and members of PSC (Target: 8000 PSC presidents)

171 of the 199 certified trainers conducted 160 seminars in 79 cities/municipalities for presidents and deputy presidents of the polling station committees, in co-operation with municipal/city election commissions. A total of 8,119 presidents and deputy presidents of the polling station committees participated in the training.

- **7,912 of the participants successfully passed the test and were awarded a certificate.**
- **The quality of the training carried out by the trainers was supervised by the election commissions and resulted in significantly lower incidence of election rules being violated** (conclusion based on the number of filed complaints regarding the work of the election administration) during the election process.

#### Activity 1.4. Create a long-term data-base of certified PSC members with relevant information on education and certification

After the different trainings for trainers as well as for commissioners, the names of the participants who passed the test and received a certificate were entered into a long term database. This database was developed based on recommendations as part of a modern software solution incorporated into the Integrated Election Information System.

- **The creation of the database, with certified trainers on the one hand and certified presidents and members of the polling station committees on the other, was an essential step towards the professionalisation of the election administration system in BiH and is an important tool for the recruitment process for future election cycles.**

#### Activity 1.5 Production of training material

The CEC further developed and printed 30,000 manuals for polling station committees: "Manual for polling station committees in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Local Elections 2016" and 6,000 manuals for election observers "Manual for election observation in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Local Elections 2016", both available in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and English.

- All members of polling stations had access to relevant information on voting procedures.

## **2. Capacity-building of women candidates for mayor**

Following up the joint Council of Europe - USAID programme on "Strengthening Accountability of Women and Young Political Leaders in BiH", and taking into account the recommendations from participants of these programmes, a series of capacity building activities on the professional use of social media was organised for female candidates for mayor for the 2016 elections. The capacity building activities were accompanied by an awareness raising campaign to promote acceptance of women in politics, jointly implemented with the civil society organisation Oneworld Platform and CEC BiH.

### Activity 2.1 Training on use of social media tools for female candidates

Female politicians from different political parties participated in trainings on the use of Social Media during election campaigns. The activities entitled “Empowering Voices”, implemented by the women’s NGO Oneworld Platform, aimed at training female candidates on how to use social media, internet and new technologies, in order to respond to three factors hindering women from being politically active in BiH: 1) the lack of resources for female candidates to reach their voters via (paid) space in mainstream media; 2) the lack of interest in politics amongst young people and in particular women; and 3) discriminatory messages about women in politics being transmitted via social medias by male opinion leaders.

- **The participants were trained to deal effectively with issues like online safety, privacy, online harassment and learned about protection tools and mechanisms.**

### Activity 2.2 Coaching and training for elected female officials

Parallel to the trainings described in 2.1, Oneworld Platform together with organisations from Bratunac (Forum žena), Gračanica (Pokret građana Gračanica) and Bihać (Glas žene) set-up, for a three month period, help desks to provide individual coaching and practical support for interested candidates.

- **Female local politicians from different political parties received practical support for the use of social media during their election campaign.**

### Activity 2.3 Awareness raising campaign for acceptance of female politicians (Public debate and video)

The participation of women in public and political life was one of the three topics of the public information campaign carried out in ten cities in BiH (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Bijeljina, Bihać, Brčko, Široki Brijeg, Trebinje, Zenica and Livno). The campaign targeted women, the elderly and national minorities in general, and addressed women with the slogan “*Don’t let others choose for you. Make your own choice! VOTE!*” in particular.

Motivation leaflets were designed and printed (25,000 copies) in the official languages of BiH and distributed at information desks and during promotional walks. Also three campaign videos were produced (one in each of the three languages for each target group) and broadcasted via billboard screens.

- **The campaign reached approximately 3,500 persons directly (in each city an average of 350 persons), and according to survey estimates the disseminated information reached indirectly up to 11,000 persons. (See also point 3.4 and 4.1)**

## **3. Capacity-building of national minority candidates for mayor**

To address the situation of under-represented minorities, and in particular Roma, in the public and political life of BiH, whether as candidates, voters and/or political party activists, a series of activities was jointly implemented with the Centre for Roma “Romalen” Kakanj and the CEC BiH to provide members of the Roma communities with the basic concepts on elections and civic participation.

### Activity 3.1 Coaching and leadership training of Roma candidates for town council and mayor

In the framework of a so called “Roma political Academy (RPA)”, implemented by the Centre for Roma “Romalen” Kakanj a two day seminar for 25 potential Roma candidates was organised on 13 August 2016. This was to provide the participants with skills to build up political visibility and increase their knowledge about the responsibility of the city council, procedures and how to raise initiatives and questions, for example how to protect and lobby for Roma citizens interest within the City Council.

During the seminar the participants learned to prepare public speeches and statements for media and to promote themselves. After the seminar participants also got practical support for the production of promotional videos which were shown at local level.

- **10 Roma candidates (9 males and 1 female ) out of 20 who did the RPA trainings, won seats in the local councils of Kakanj, Tuzla, Zenica, Lukavac, Zavidovići, Gradiška, Banovići, Visoko and Vukosavlje.**

#### Activity 3.2 Awareness raising campaign for political participation of Roma (Public Debates and video)

- a) The public awareness raising campaign (described in 2.3) carried out in ten cities in BiH (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Bijeljina, Bihać, Brčko, Široki Brijeg, Trebinje, Zenica and Livno) from 2-15 September 2016, also addressed the need for national minorities to become actively involved in the local election process. Video spots and leaflets were produced and widely distributed with the slogan *“Every vote is equal. National minorities are not less worth! VOTE!”*
- b) While the general campaign reached approximately 3,500 persons directly (in each city an average of 350 persons), only an estimated 14% of all the visitors who attended the information events were members of the national minorities.
- c) To raise awareness within the Roma communities about electing their own representatives and how to prevent all forms of manipulation and electoral fraud, 12 workshops for members of the Roma communities of Tuzla, Visoko, Vitez, Zenica, Ilijaš, Donji Vakuf, Kakanj, Breza, Visoko (FBiH) and Vukosavlje, Modriča and Prnjavor (RS) were organised between 22 August and 29 September 2016.

The workshops were facilitated by mediators from the ROMED programme, who also promoted on a wider scale the workshops and provided technical assistance. Candidates from different political parties were invited to the workshops, and members of the Roma communities had the possibility to present their requests and planned activities for resolving problems of the Roma population to the candidates.

Topics of the workshops were: a) *Your voice is important! Each of voters is important and each of ballots is countable*, b) *Correct way of voting and importance of voting* and c) *Go to the Election 2016! Voting is civic duty but also democratic right*.

- **Using synergies with other Roma programmes within Council of Europe, such as the Council of Europe ROMED programme and the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, the activity showed very good results with a numerous and very active participation of the Roma Communities. Requests were made to adjust this programme also for other countries.**

#### **4. Voters' awareness raising (focusing in particular on elderly voters)**

The involvement of elderly people (as of 65 and above) in the electoral process was another focus of the programme. Despite being one of the most vulnerable groups when it comes to violations of the right to vote, until now this target group had not been directly involved in any electoral assistance programme. The project “Increasing elderly peoples' participation in election processes in BiH” was considered to be a pilot activity within the programme. Building upon the fact that this group presents more than 20% of the population of BiH and that their active participation in public and political life is very low, a series of awareness raising activities and trainings were jointly implemented with the Association of Elections Officials BiH and CEC BiH.

#### Activity 4.1 Implementation of a broad awareness-raising campaign to get elderly people actively involved in the elections process

With the slogan *“Let's be a true example to future generations, because we make almost one fifth of the electorate in Bosnia and Herzegovina!”*, the public information campaign, described in 2.3, also targeted the political participation of elderly people. With the wide distribution of leaflets and video spots they were called upon to make use of their right to vote and were invited to share their political experiences with the younger generations.

Activity 4.2 Information and sensibilisation workshops for elderly people in 40 municipalities in BiH (80 workshops targeting at least 1,000 persons) and Activity 4.3 Production of information brochures for elderly voters

In order to create, through a peer-to-peer approach, an environment where elderly people feel secure and comfortable, participants were given the possibility to share their experiences and express their concerns. The workshops for the elderly had also practical aims, notably how to reduce the number of invalid ballots by explaining how to correctly fill in complicated ballots and or how to request assistance if needed.

The problem of “family voting” and the importance of insisting on the right to vote by themselves, were other issues discussed during the workshops. Parallel to the 50 workshops information brochures were distributed massively throughout the country.

- **More than 1,500 elderly people participated in the activity.**
- **The activities also had an important secondary effect on social integration, making elderly people to understand the importance of being once again involved in public life and following political developments in their country.**

## **5. Transversal activities**

Activity 5.1 Post-election conference: “Local Elections 2016 – Lessons Learned and Steps Ahead”

The conference “2016 Local Elections – lesson learned”, held on 23-24 February 2017 in Sarajevo aimed to analyse the 2016 local elections in BiH and to formulate a proposal to improve the overall electoral process. The input to the discussion was given by the CEC, who provided an in-depth analysis with facts and figures on the performance of the election commissions of the basic constituencies. Ms Carla Dejonghe (Belgium), member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, presented the findings of their observation mission.

Within three thematic workshops “*Participation of political subjects in the elections; Legal framework and protection of the election law and Effectiveness and transparency of election administration*” following the introduction session the participants discussed the challenges and main obstacles, as well as their proposals on how to define concrete activities to improve these three thematic areas.

The conference brought together more than 200 participants – representatives of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, municipal/city election commissions, domestic and international election experts, including representatives of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Office of the Council of Europe in Bosnia and Herzegovina, political parties, international organisations, local and international NGOs, media and the academic community.

- **The workshops’ conclusions will be used to formulate the proposals for improving the electoral process and were submitted to the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina in its Report on the implementation of the laws under the competences of the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina.**
- **The conclusions will be also sent to the inter-departmental working group for improvement of electoral legislation, which has resumed its work in February 2017, for consideration.**
- **The conference contributed to a higher visibility of the missions and work of the CEC BiH and to the exchange of good practice between electoral stakeholders of BiH.**

## Appendix

### Programme for pre-electoral assistance to support the 2016 Local Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina

| Action  | Time scale                             | Amount spent              | Implementing Unit  |
|---|--|---------------------------|--|
| <b>1. CAPACITY-BUILDING OF THE ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION</b>   |  | <b>TOTAL: €100,782.77</b> |  |
| 1.1 Develop unified curriculum for the education of election administration in line with international standards                                | April - September                      |                           | DGII and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo                  |
| 1.2 Training and certification of trainers for municipal and polling station election commissions of 142 municipalities (300 trainers selected) |  |                           |  |
| 1.3 Training and certification of presidents and members of PSC (8,000 PSC presidents selected)   |  |                           |  |
| 1.4 Create a long-term data-base of certified PSC members with relevant information on education and certification                              |  |                           |  |
| 1.5 Production of training material (Brochure and video)  |  |                           |  |
| <b>2. CAPACITY-BUILDING OF WOMEN CANDIDATES FOR MAYOR</b>   |  | <b>TOTAL: €20,664.76</b>  |  |
| 2.1. Training on use of social media tools for female candidates  | February-September<br>October-May 2017 |                           | DGII and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo                  |
| 2.2. Coaching and training for elected female officials   |  |                           |  |
| 2.3. Awareness raising campaign for acceptance of female politicians (Public debate and video)  |  |                           |  |
| <b>3. CAPACITY-BUILDING OF NATIONAL MINORITY CANDIDATES FOR MAYOR</b>   |  | <b>TOTAL: €19,630.00</b>  |  |
| 3.1. Coaching and leadership training of Roma candidates for town council and mayor   | February-September                     |                           | DGII, ROMED Programme and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo |
| 3.2. Awareness raising campaign for political participation of Roma (Public Debates and video)  |  |                           |  |
| <b>4. VOTERS' AWARENESS RAISING (FOCUSING IN PARTICULAR ON ELDERLY VOTERS)</b>  |  | <b>TOTAL: €30,000.00</b>  |  |
| 4.1. Implementation of a broad awareness-raising campaign to get elderly people actively involved in the elections process                      | June - September                       |                           | DGII and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo                  |

|  |                 |                          |   |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------|---|
| 4.2. Information and sensibilisation workshops for elderly people in 40 municipalities in BiH (80 workshops targeting at least 1000 persons) | April-September |                          | DGII and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo |
| 4.3. Production of information brochures for elderly voters  | April - June    |                          | DGII and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo |
| <b>5. TRANSVERSAL ACTIVITIES</b>   |                 | <b>TOTAL: €18,922.47</b> |   |
| 5.1. Post-election conference: "Local Elections 2016 – Lessons Learned and Steps Ahead"  | December        |                          | DGII and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo |
| <b>TOTAL SPENT</b>   |                 | <b>€190,000.00</b>       |   |
| Extraordinary Budget   |                 | €90,000.00               |   |
| Ordinary Budget  |                 | €100,000.00              |   |