

48th SESSION**Local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (6 October 2024)**

Recommendation 530 (2025)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:
 - a. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Committee of Ministers’ Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
 - b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) ratified by Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12 July 2002;
 - c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;
 - d. the previous Congress Recommendation on local and regional elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
 - e. the invitation by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dated 15 May 2024, to observe the local elections held in the country on 6 October 2024.
2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress’s role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.
3. The Congress acknowledges that the legal framework provides a sound basis for organising local elections and that the 2024 amendments significantly improved the integrity of the process. The Congress regrets that such a decision had to be made only a few months before the election day by the High Representative due to the absence of locally owned consensus on electoral and constitutional reform.
4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:
 - a. the 2024 amendments significantly improved the integrity of the electoral process and contributed to a less hostile election campaign with fewer instances of hate speech and disinformation;
 - b. the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) worked professionally, handled or initiated ex-officio over 2 000 proceedings on electoral violations, issued numerous complaints and strived to guarantee the overall integrity of the electoral process, despite facing challenges to implement the significant new tasks introduced in the 2024 amendments;
 - c. the introduction of CEC-appointed chairpersons and deputy-chairpersons of polling station commissions, while very sensitive to implement, significantly reduced the long-standing issue of trading of seats;
 - d. the election day was overall calm and organised in a professional manner and the four pilot projects deployed to introduce the use of new technologies in the electoral process were overall assessed positively and perceived as an additional safeguard to the integrity of the process;

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-16](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Marcin GOLASZEWSKI, Poland (L, EPP/CCE).

e. the introduction of the electronic procedure for candidate registration, via a dedicated online platform, significantly facilitated the candidate verification and registration procedures;

f. the legal framework allows for the participation of national minorities in local elections, as voters, candidates and members of the election administration;

g. despite important societal obstacles to their participation, numerous young and female candidates stood in elections for local councils and to participated in the work of polling station commissions (PSC).

5. At the same time, the Congress expresses its concern with respect to the following issues:

a. in a context marked by social and political fragmentation, the lack of political will to complete negotiations on much-needed electoral reforms led the High Representative to adopt wide-ranging amendments shortly before the election period, undermining the stability of the electoral framework;

b. the inadequate human and financial resources of the CEC, combined with political pressure and tight timeframes to implement extensive amendments, placed a significant burden on all levels of administration and left some important legal provisions partially or fully unfulfilled, notably on the appointments of PSC chairpersons and deputies;

c. despite a more proactive approach to sanctioning campaign violations, the number of allegations of misuse of administrative resources and other violations by political subjects remained worryingly high in the weeks leading to the elections;

d. challenges to establish an accurate voters register persisted, due to the inclusion of a high number of deceased voters or voters living *de facto* abroad but registered to vote in local elections, which is not in line with Congress Recommendation 369 (2015) "Electoral lists and voters residing *de facto* abroad";

e. election dispute resolution was negatively affected by an increase in the number of disputes, important backlogs and insufficient transparency, notably on the publication of some decisions and the proportionality and justification of sanctions, which resulted in hundreds of proceedings pending on election day and limited the right to an effective remedy; the procedure for the appointment of PSC chairpersons and deputies lacked final judicial oversight;

f. while disillusionment with electoral processes is widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina, voters were provided with insufficient information to make an informed choice, as media coverage was limited and political subjects often failed to appear in debates or to explain their plans if elected;

g. the media landscape was negatively affected by the worrying situation of the public broadcasters, the lack of transparency of media ownership and increasing political pressure and threats against journalists in Republika Srpska;

h. the election day was marked by some technical and procedural inconsistencies and irregularities and Congress teams observed significant breaches to the secrecy of the vote, some delays due to technical issues in stations piloting IT solutions and a relatively high number of important violations, while accessibility for voters with mobility impairments was not ensured in most polling stations;

i. campaign and party finance provisions still did not guarantee full transparency and accountability as reports were handled only after the election day and were marred by allegations of underreporting, while sanctions were perceived as not dissuasive, timely or proportional enough to counterbalance the financial benefits for political parties that circumvent legal provisions; at the same time, newly established spending limits were considered unrealistically low in some municipalities;

j. participation of women and youth in local democracy was limited, in particular in local leadership positions, and amendments to promote gender equality in the media and campaign events were broadly unsuccessful;

k. provisions on the right to be elected based on ethnic criteria have been repeatedly deemed in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights and were not addressed by the latest amendments;

l. due to its ethnic-based political structure, the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is still perceived as permeable to external influences, in particular during election campaigns.

6. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to:

a. re-open, in view of the 2026 general elections, broad and inclusive negotiations on comprehensive electoral and constitutional reform to address longstanding discriminatory provisions and tackle remaining shortcomings;

b. urgently consider measures and funds to strengthen the capacities of the election administration and fully empower the CEC to investigate and sanction violations in a transparent, timely and proportional manner; raise awareness of political entities as regards the new provisions of the law and applicable sanctions, as a means to mainstream the fight against electoral corruption;

c. pursue efforts to clean up and make public the Central Voters Register and address the lack of residency requirement to vote in local elections;

d. take steps to enhance transparency and professionalism of the election administration in particular on election dispute resolution, increase capacity of the legal department of the CEC to handle all proceedings in a timely manner and introduce judicial review of PSC appointments;

e. fully implement existing media legislation in a timely manner including oversight and enforcement powers of bodies responsible for media monitoring, and promote programme-based and inclusive debates; in Republika Srpska specifically, refrain from further weakening freedom of expression in the entity and introduce measures to protect journalists from political pressure;

f. improve the accessibility and review the layout of polling stations, reinforce the training provided to lower-level commissioners in order to increase their knowledge of counting procedures and consider the introduction of more dissuasive sanctions in case of electoral violations;

g. on IT pilot projects specifically, strengthen the reliability of electronic systems by refining related procedures and organise well ahead of elections comprehensive training and information on deployed technologies, both for electoral officials and voters;

h. limit the use of cash transactions in campaigns, publish interim reports upon reception and introduce more proportional sanctions in cases of non-submission of reports and underreporting; in line with past GRECO recommendations, give the Central Electoral Commission a mandate to supervise the expenditures of political parties outside electoral campaigns;

i. review provisions aimed at increasing the participation of women and youth in decision-making positions, as mayors or heads of lists, and consider quotas in seat allocation and de-registration of lists not complying with gender quotas;

j. conduct an analysis of potential influence by foreign actors in local elections and identify steps to prevent violations related to voters lists, campaign events and campaign finance.

7. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation regarding the 2024 local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.