

Election of Republika Srpska president saw candidates campaign freely but lacked a level playing field, international observers say

BANJA LUKA, 24 November 2025 – While candidates could campaign freely ahead of yesterday's early election of the president of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the undue advantages enjoyed by the ruling party combined with the removal of public campaign funding created an uneven playing field, international observers said in a [statement](#) today.

The joint observation of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress), and the European Parliament (EP) found that the legal framework provides a sufficient basis for holding democratic elections. While a number of previous ODIHR and Congress recommendations were addressed through extensive changes ahead of the 2024 elections, many still remain unaddressed, including voting and candidacy rights, comprehensive regulation of the misuse of public resources, women's participation, transparency of the dispute resolution, and oversight of campaign finance.

"This election was well organised despite the numerous challenges. But all candidates in an election need to have equal opportunities, and in this case the playing field was uneven," said Mátyás Eörsi, Head of the ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission. "To rebuild the trust of citizens, all parties need to stop using prejudiced and intolerant language and work together to ensure the integrity of the election process is strengthened."

The candidate registration process was inclusive and all nominees were registered, but eligibility requirements continue to be discriminatory. The election administration carried out its duties professionally despite considerable challenges that further strained its limited operational capacity. However, confidence in the independence and impartiality of different levels of the election administration varied. Although not a comprehensive assessment, in the limited number of polling stations visited on election day, observers assessed the process as professional and well organized, despite problems including challenges to the secrecy of the vote.

"Politics fails to deliver future for the youth," said Bernd Vöhringer, who headed the Congress delegation. "We welcome a generally well-organized election, despite some irregularities. Particularly the authorities should work on the secrecy of vote and accessibility for all. However, we regret the campaign was marked by polarization and inflammatory rhetoric and did not address the real issues facing the people. The lack of clear political programmes, an uneven level playing field, notably on public campaign financing, and a muted campaign contributed to disillusionment and led to a low turnout. Every election should connect with all citizens, focusing on their needs and aspiration, not on deepening divisions."

There was general reluctance across the political spectrum to participate in this election, which was viewed by some as imposed by the state-level authorities and the Office of the High Representative and was seen as a significant strain on financial resources ahead of the national elections due to take place next year. The campaign focused on issues of national identity rather than concrete social and economic topics. In addition to polarising narratives, the campaign was marred by some instances of inflammatory language, despite the election administration urging all parties not to make statements that might provoke tensions.

"The voting process was smooth and the rules were followed overall," said Sérgio Humberto, Head of the EP delegation. "In our assessment of the entire campaign though, we found public awareness of these elections was low and citizens were provided with very limited information on candidates' programmes."

The campaign finance framework does not ensure transparency or accountability and in addition, the law does not regulate third-party campaigning, against international good practice. While the election administration reviewed election complaints in an open and timely way, only limited information was made available on how cases were handled.

The media landscape in Republika Srpska is vibrant, but editorial policies and content are divided along party lines, and media ownership is not transparent. While both public broadcasters complied with the legal requirement to provide candidates with free airtime during the campaign, the public broadcaster in Republika Srpska devoted most of its election coverage to the campaign of the ruling party candidate, negatively affecting confidence in its impartiality. The election law does not adequately regulate online campaigning on the internet or social media platforms.

The international observation of the early election of the president of Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina totalled 43 observers, composed of 21 ODIHR experts, 16 members and staff from the Congress, and 6 from the EP.

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