

**Congress Election Observation Mission to Republika Srpska  
(Bosnia and Herzegovina)**

**Early Elections for President, 23 November 2025**

**24 November 2025 - 15:00, Banja Luka**

**STATEMENT OF THE HEAD OF DELEGATION,  
Mr Bernd Vöhringer, Germany**

*To check against delivery*

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good afternoon,

I also wish you a very warm welcome to this joint press conference.

The Congress of the Council of Europe greatly valued the cooperation with our partners of the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament during this mission.

I would also like to thank the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina for their invitation to observe these elections.

I was pleased to be the Head of the delegation of elected members of the Congress of local and regional authorities for this mission. Allow me to say a few words about the Congress. It is one of the two political assemblies of the Council of Europe. It represents over 130 000 territorial authorities. It is explicitly mandated for strengthening local and regional democracy across its 46 member States, including via periodic election observation. It was the

twelfth time the Congress observed elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For this mission, our delegation comprised 16 observers, coming from 14 countries. We observed procedures in more than 110 polling stations across Republika Srpska and the Brčko district, from opening to closing and we followed the counting process in eight polling stations.

In the days preceding the vote, the Congress delegation held meetings in Sarajevo and Banja Luka with a wide range of key stakeholders, including the election administration, the Office of the High Representative in Banja Luka, the media, civil society organisations, and candidates and representatives of various political parties.

I fully concur with the statement of Mátyás EÖRSI.

We welcome the fact that the early elections for president, despite initial uncertainty and legal disputes, eventually proceeded in line with the applicable framework and the calendar set by the Central Election Commission.

The delegation commended the ability of the CEC to work independently under compressed timelines, despite bureaucratic delays, a lack of resources and political pressure.

The elections yesterday were also an important test for the institutions at all levels ahead of next year's general elections. We therefore hope that our assessment will contribute constructively to the preparations for 2026.

Overall, we observed a calm and orderly electoral process. We welcomed a generally well-organised election day, despite some irregularities, many of which were already identified by Congress

observers during last year's local elections. In particular, we emphasise that efforts to safeguard the secrecy of the vote are essential.

All Congress observers agreed that the current layout of polling stations, designed to reduce the possibility of photographing ballots, did not fully ensure voter privacy. Breaches of secrecy were also noted when voters did not fold their ballot papers properly and in a few, but concerning cases, of party observers tracking voters.

Other procedural inconsistencies, most notably on the sealing of ballot boxes, highlighted again the need for more comprehensive training.

We also regretted that, once more, most polling stations visited were not fully accessible to voters with mobility impairments. As previously recommended, the authorities should intensify their efforts to ensure greater accessibility for all. It does not only affect voters on election day but all citizens with impairments in their daily lives.

As we often say, election day procedures are only one side of the coin. So I would like to expand on our observations on the election campaign.

We regretted that the short and rather silent campaign was marked by polarisation and inflammatory rhetoric and by constitutional and judicial disputes, creating a level of uncertainty and voter apathy. Only six candidates stood for elections, most of them generally unknown by the voters, and no woman ran for these elections.

The campaign did not address the real issues facing the people of Republika Srpska. We observed that parties and candidates struggled to concretely articulate what they would do, if elected,

and focused mainly on political rivalries, ahead of the 2026 elections.

As it stands, politics fail to deliver future for the youth.

Every election should connect with all citizens, focusing on their needs and aspiration, not on deepening divisions. This should always remain the primary goal of every democratic election, regardless of the country and the level of government.

Furthermore, the lack of public campaign funding undermined the possibilities of the political parties to conduct a dynamic campaign.

We were also made aware of a still high number of allegations of misuse of public resources, a practice long noted by the Congress and which provides an unfair advantage to the incumbent administration.

In short, the lack of clear political programmes, the uneven level playing field, notably on public campaign financing and access to the media, and a muted campaign contributed to disillusionment and a significant lack of public interest, as reflected in the low voter turnout, which heavy snowfalls and power cuts further affected.

In view of the 2026 general elections, we look forward to pursue the political dialogue with the authorities, at every level, to implement outstanding Congress recommendations and to reinforce local and regional democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, following this mission, we will prepare a report together with recommendations addressed to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina

This will be presented for adoption at the Congress session in Strasbourg next March.

Once again, I thank all the members of this joint international election observation mission and look forward to answering any questions.