

EDDA
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION



FINAL REPORT
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
GENERAL ELECTIONS 7 OCTOBER 2018

On the 7th of October 2018, presidential– and parliamentary elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. EDDA - European Dialogue and Democracy Association, conducted a short-term Election Observation Mission (EOM), deploying a team consisting of 15 short-term observers (STOs). The mission was performed together with local interpreters on the Election Day. The short-term observer mission was headed by Kristian Østvik, Bujar Avdili Fera and Hannah Kvamsdal.

On Election Day EDDA´s STOs was divided into 7 teams. The teams visited a total of 50 different polling stations, whereas 6 opening- and 6 closing procedures in the electoral district of the capital, Sarajevo. The STOs were present in Sarajevo four days prior to Election Day, where they met with relevant international and national organizations and institutions in order to gain sufficient information regarding the current political, economic and social situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The STOs were officially accredited by the Central Election Commission (CEC), and the EOM complied to international standards for election observation, as well as to the election law of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Prior to the EOM, the STOs received training in terms of the OSCE/ODIHR Comprehensive E-Learning course, and an election observation course at the University of Bergen held by associate professor in Comparative Politics, Terje Knutsen. During the stay in Sarajevo, the STOs participated in a seminar for international observers organized by CEC, in order for the STOs to obtain a better understanding of the electoral law and electoral procedures.

The total number of registered voters was 3,352,933, and the CEC reported a turnout of 53,3 per cent.¹ The electorate casted their ballots for the state presidency and the House of Representatives (state-level), as well as members of the entity and cantonal parliaments. In total four ballots were to cast for each eligible voter.

The CEC registered 60 parties and 16 coalitions, with 3,515 candidates on the lists. 25 independent candidates were also registered.

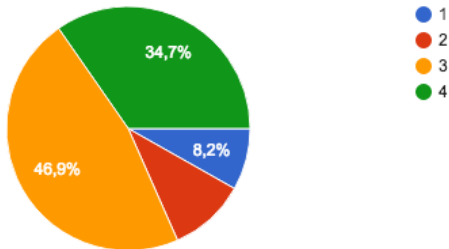
OPENING PROCEDURES

The opening of the voting centres proceeded mostly in an orderly manner, and the STOs were able to have a clear view of the procedures performed by the polling station officials (PSOs). Sufficient material was present. Nevertheless, procedural omissions were observed. In several cases ballot boxes were not properly sealed, which made it possible to stuff ballot papers in the boxes. One polling station opened 15 minutes late. In a few instances, local observers and party observers intervened in the work performed by the PSOs. Overall the STOs rated 50 percent of the opening procedures as “very good”, while 33 percent was rated as “bad”, on a one to four point-scale where 1 is “very bad” and 4 is “very good”.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Overall, the voting process was assessed positively in 81,6 percent of the total 50 polling stations observed. The overall attitude towards the observers, and the transparency of the voting procedures, was to a high degree reported as positive. However, irregularities were observed.

Overall rating (1 very bad – 4 very good):
49 svar



The STOs observed that five of the polling stations opened too late (after 7am). In half of the polling stations observed, access to polling stations was challenging for disabled voters and in some cases campaign material was observed close to the polling stations. The voting procedures

¹ <http://hr.n1info.com/a337908/English/NEWS/Bosnia-CEC-presents-preliminary-election-results.html>
<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/398957?download=true>

were in most cases observed to be followed, however a total of 7 out of 50 polling stations were reported negatively in respect to procedures followed.

Several instances of overcrowding and chaotic atmosphere were noted, and voting booths were observed to be placed too close to each other. Secrecy of the vote was for such reasons difficult to ensure. Many STOs reported that polling stations were too small for the number of registered voters. There was little space for international election observers, and many STOs reported that they felt that they occupied important space. And in some instances they felt unwanted. Some STOs reported that uncomfortable questions were asked to them, and aggressive behaviour led the STOs to leave the pollings stations. EDDA's STOs were in one instance asked to leave the polling station, and in another instance refused entrance with the explanation that the observers were not on a list of "invited observers".

It was observed several times that party observers interfered in the voting process and kept track on voters.

Ballot boxes were often observed to be inappropriately sealed and some voters did not fold their ballot before casting. Many instances of voters using their mobile phone inside the polling booths were noted. Some instances of family voting and carousel voting were observed, in addition to indications of ballot box stuffing.

Some STOs observed that PSOs did not wear a badge, explaining that they "were called up for the job last night". Instances where the PSOs seemed to lack knowledge on the procedures, were also noted.

CLOSING PROCEDURES

Of the total five polling stations observed during closing and counting, the STOs assessed the procedures in many cases as "very good" (50 percent), and four out of five teams stated that they found the overall performance of the PSOs satisfactory. The STOs assessed 25 percent of the procedures as "bad". All the polling stations observed during closing and counting procedures had five or six PSOs, and 60 percent of the PSOs were female. Close to all teams left the polling station between 2:30am and 4:00am.

All of the STOs reported that they had a clear overview of all aspects of the counting procedures, and in four out of five instances counting was conducted in a transparent environment.

Some PSOs were observed to have inadequate training and lack of knowledge on the procedures, and some counting procedures were reported as chaotic and stressful including disagreement on the counting results. In four out of five instances, the number of registered voters recorded as having voted did not correspond with the number of ballots cast. In four out of five instances, the number of invalid ballots seemed inordinately high.

The STOs reported largely that party- or local observers participated and got involved in the counting process. Instances of the use of mobile phones (taking pictures of results and making phone calls) by party observers and PSOs were also observed.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on EDDA's election observation mission of total 50 different polling stations in Sarajevo on Election Day during the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina the 7th of October 2018, the overall assessment is that it has been conducted in a free and fair manner. EDDA's STOs still observed a number of serious irregularities. Family voting and carousel voting were observed, indications of ballot box stuffing were observed, and many polling stations were overcrowded and chaotic both during the voting- and counting process. EDDA's STOs were mostly met with positive attitudes, but instances of aggressive behaviour towards the STOs, and denied entrance were experienced. The PSOs were in many instances disturbed in their work by party- or local observers. Campaign material was observed close to polling stations and many of the polling stations was challenging for disabled people to enter. It was also observed that ballot boxes were not properly sealed, and secrecy of the vote was difficult to ensure in some instances. The voting procedures were conducted according to the procedures. Most of the irregularities seemed to be caused by inadequate training by the PSOs, rather than attempts of fraud.