EUROPEAN DIALOGUE &
DEMOCRACY ASSOCIATION (EDDA)
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION



FINAL REPORT
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
GENERAL ELECTIONS 2026

INTRODUCTION

The European Dialogue and Democracy Association (EDDA) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, set on October 4, 2026. The EOM consisted of 34 short-term observers, including three coordinators and two district coordinators. This marked EDDA's largest EOM abroad to date, covering three cities. It was EDDA's third EOM in the country, the previous two being in 2018 and 2022.

On election day, EDDA's observers were deployed in 14 teams of two observers and one team of three observers. Interpreters accompanied 10 out of 15 teams. The observers were deployed across three cities; nine teams observed in Sarajevo, three in Mostar, and three in Zenica. The teams observed the opening of polling stations, voting procedures, and closing and counting procedures.

Based on a limited number of observations made on election day, EDDA's impression is that the elections were generally well administered at the polling station level. Polling Station Officials (PSOs) demonstrated a high degree of transparency and order, mostly receiving positive overall ratings from EDDA's observers. This is notwithstanding some issues, particularly concerning the secrecy of the vote, accessibility for persons with disabilities, technical difficulties, and inconsistent adherence to closing and counting procedures.

The EOM was led by Head of Mission Ingjerd Erika Eid Skjerven and co-coordinated by Hedda Bjørnskau and Nora Nordvik. In addition, Sarah Aasen and Antonia Turcanu functioned as district coordinators.

METHODOLOGY

EDDA is a Norwegian non-governmental organisation built on the three main pillars of democracy, election observation and education. EDDA seeks to increase young people's interest in and knowledge of democratic processes, with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. In addition, EDDA aims to promote and support free and fair elections through international election observation.

Due to the organisation's inability to deploy election observers for the duration of the entire electoral period, EDDA exclusively conducts short-term election observation on election day and does not report on long-term trends or processes beyond these findings. It is important to note, however, that any election is a sum of complex chains of actions and/or inactions by a plethora of electoral stakeholders taken before, throughout and after the electoral process, many of which are not carried out or visible on election day. This report does not aim to make representative claims or provide generalisable statements on the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather to communicate the observations made by EDDA on election day.

EDDA's election observation methodology is based on internationally recognised standards and principles for election observation, particularly those established by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). Observers reported their findings through standardised observation forms designed to assess key aspects of the electoral process in a consistent and systematic manner.

The EOM spanned six days, from September 30 to October 5, 2026. Prior to arriving in Bosnia and Herzegovina, all EDDA's observers completed a training programme consisting of a course on election observation provided by NORCAP and a seminar on Bosnia and Herzegovina's historical and political context delivered by Kjersti Cristina Klæboe from the Norwegian Ministry of Defence. To strengthen their understanding of the country-specific context, the EDDA delegation also met with a range of national and international stakeholders in Sarajevo ahead of election day, including Ms. Kathrine Biering, the Norwegian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, representatives from the European Delegation to the country, Council of Europe, Pod Lupom, Transparency International and Professor Samir Foric at the University of Sarajevo.

The expert briefings and meetings with stakeholders provided valuable insight into Bosnia and Herzegovina's complex electoral system. They indicated that the elections took place in an environment in which ethnic divisions among Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats continue to affect public participation in the general elections, and that there is generally low trust in the electoral process. Furthermore, the meetings highlighted concerns about corruption in public procurement ahead of election day, as well as the implications of the implementation of a new electoral code and new technologies. The

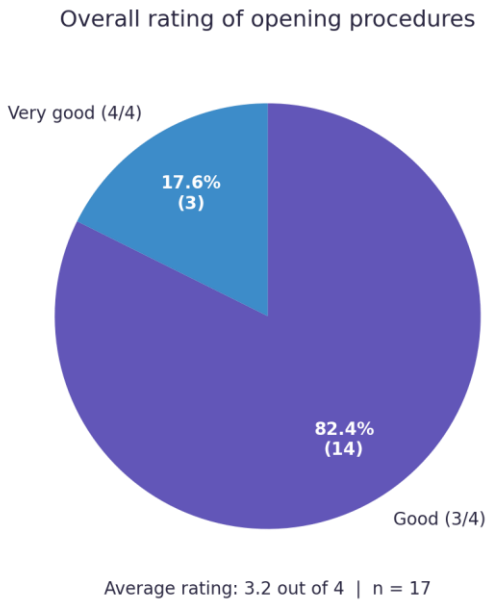
new technologies introduced for this election included biometric voter identification and ballot scanners. It is important to note that these issues are noted here for context only.

All EDDA's observers were accredited by the Central Election Commission (CEC). All observations made on election day were reported in the Vote Monitor application by Commit Global.

OPENING PROCEDURES

The EDDA delegation observed opening procedures in 15 polling stations, where 14 were situated in urban areas, and one was situated in a rural area. Overall, the process was assessed positively, with EDDA's observers generally being able to carry out their work without restrictions. However, some delays, technical difficulties, and procedural inconsistencies were noted.

According to our observations, 11 out of 15 polling stations did not open at the scheduled time of 07:00. Opening times in these cases ranged from 07:03 to 07:30. The delays were mainly attributed to technical difficulties with ballot scanners and ballot boxes, as well as time-consuming ballot counting or other operational issues. In one case, the polling station opened 18 minutes late because officials did not have access to the key to the school building where the polling station was located.



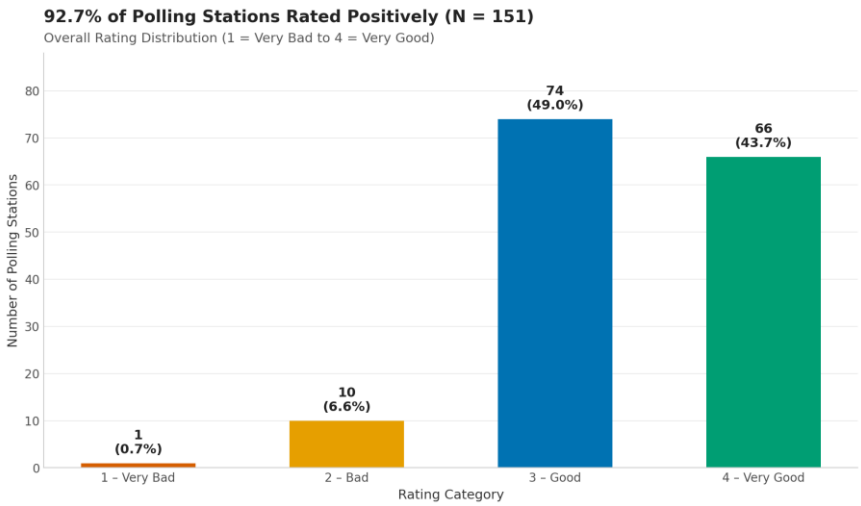
Despite these delays, the overall assessments were generally positive, with all polling stations being rated as either *good* or *very good*. This results in an average score of 3.2 on a four-point scale, where 1 represents *very bad*, and 4 represents *very good*. All observer teams had a clear view of the opening procedures and were not restricted in their work. They also confirmed that the functionality of the technical equipment had been verified by the designated operators. Furthermore, all necessary election materials were reported to be present in all but one polling station, where visible information explaining how to cast a vote was not provided.

Technical difficulties were reported in five out of 15 cases, primarily related to switching on the ballot scanners and/or biometric identification device and preparing them for use. These issues were, however, resolved relatively quickly. Some inconsistencies were

noted in the completion of the protocol, including cases where ballot box seal numbers had not been recorded. Observations in two polling stations indicated that not all PSOs had signed the required protocol at the time of observation.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

On election day, EDDA's observers reported from 151 polling stations in and around Sarajevo, as well as in Mostar and Zenica. Thirteen of the polling stations were located in Republika Sprska, whilst the remaining were located in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 12 polling stations were situated in rural areas and 139 in urban areas. 62% of the polling station commissions were led by women. Overall, the conduct of the voting procedures was generally well executed and followed the official procedures, notwithstanding irregularities regarding the secrecy of the vote, as well as technical inconsistencies. Regarding how well procedures were followed, nearly four in five observed polling stations (79%) scored a 4 or 5 on a five-point scale. 92% of observed polling stations received an overall assessment of *good* or *very good,* resulting in an average score of 3.36 on a four-point scale.



Conditions in and around the polling station

Observers reported tension or unrest in five polling stations, caused by overcrowding and queues. In two instances, voters grew restless or tense in narrow corridors and stairwells, and in another instance, a voter indicated frustration concerning voting booth visibility and ballot privacy. EDDA observers also noted a president of the polling station committee voicing frustration over a lack of training and PSOs adapting poorly to new voting technologies.

About 60% of the polling stations were not accessible for persons with disabilities. Several polling stations were located on upper floors or had stairs at the entrance, with no ramp or functioning elevator in the building. Seven instances of political and religious material were reported in proximity to the polling stations, including campaign materials. Other observers were present at 63% of the polling stations, including party observers and other international and national observers.

Observers reported no signs of organised transport, attempts at multiple voting or vote buying in or around the polling stations. Group voting was observed at 11 polling stations, often involving family members or parents with children inside the booth. EDDA's observers reported instances of voters requiring assistance in 32 polling stations, with correct procedures being followed in 21 of these.

Voting material and ballots

Ballot boxes were correctly sealed in almost all observed cases. Exceptions include four instances of loosely fastened seals, one instance of a seal being taped back together, and one instance where seals were cut. In one polling station, the box for ID receipts was missing, and an open box on the floor was used instead.

EDDA observers reported voters struggling to fill out their ballots at approximately 30% of polling stations. In 15% of polling stations observed, PSOs did not instruct the voters on how to fill out the ballots. The general problem appeared to be a lack of voter education, with elderly voters seeming to be particularly challenged. At two polling stations, individual voters spent up to 20 minutes in the booth. In one case, a PSO entered the booth with the voter to help fill out the ballot, not in line with procedures, and in other instances, party observers present would intervene to explain to voters how to fill out the ballot.

EDDA observers assessed the polling station officials' understanding of voting procedures as largely adequate. On a five-point scale, where 1 is categorised as *very bad,* and 5 is *very good*, 78% of the stations were rated 4 or 5, while 22% were rated either 2 or 3.

Secrecy of the vote

EDDA observers assessed the layout of the polling stations as generally suitable for facilitating voting procedures in 88% of the observed venues. However, this did not necessarily translate into adequate safeguards for the secrecy of the vote, with EDDA observers identifying issues related to ballot secrecy in 39% of polling stations observed. This was mostly due to the placement and layout of voting booths, as well as space

constraints. At the scanner, queues formed close to the booths, and in PSOs' attempts to assist voters, instances of ballots being visible were observed.

Technical equipment

At 28 polling stations, EDDA observers noted an alarm, signalling problems with either the biometric identification machine or the scanning of ballots. The most common reason was voters appearing at the wrong polling station. At three polling stations, observers noted repeated issues with registering fingerprints. Observers noted that elderly voters seemed to have more difficulty getting their fingerprints approved. Where biometric identification did not work, PSOs followed the prescribed alternative procedure. Problems with scanning of ballots were reported in seven polling stations.

Transparency and attitudes towards international observers

EDDA's observers were restricted in their observation at two polling stations. In these two cases, observers were told they could not enter or remain at the station without an interpreter. Nevertheless, on a five-point scale, the overall attitude towards international observers was rated as 4 or 5 in 94% of observed polling stations, and the transparency of the voting procedures was assessed as 4 or 5 at 95% of observed polling stations.

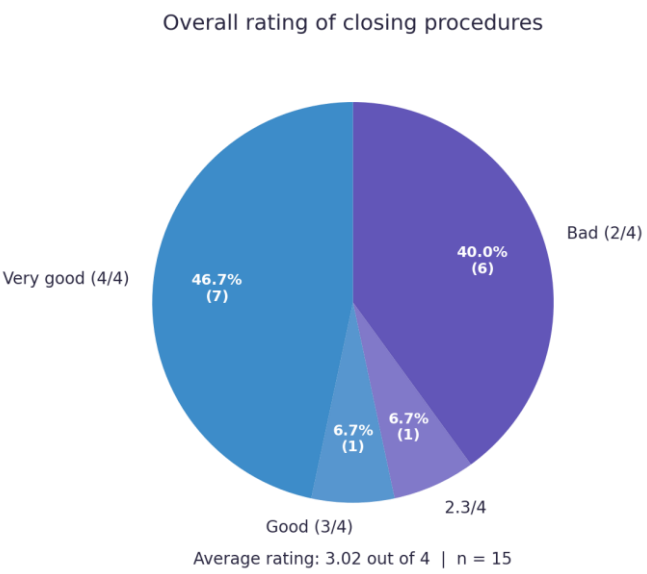
CLOSING AND COUNTING PROCEDURES

EDDA observers were present during the closing and counting procedures at 15 polling stations. All polling stations were located in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the cities of Sarajevo, Zenica and Mostar. Two of the polling stations were situated in rural areas, whilst 13 were in urban areas. Nine out of 15 polling station committees were led by women. In 12 out of 15 observed polling stations, other authorised persons were present during the counting procedures, including party observers from NiP, SDA, Pomak-Pokret, Snago Naroda, DF, non-partisan observers, and one instance of international observers other than EDDA.

EDDA observers were able to clearly observe all aspects of the counting procedures at 14 out of 15 polling stations.

EDDA observers evaluated the overall conduct of closing and counting procedures at 3.02 on a scale from 1 to 4. In general, procedures were followed correctly, and PSOs demonstrated a good understanding of the process. However, the introduction of new technologies and the complexity of conducting elections at several levels of government posed challenges for some PSOs, contributing to irregularities of varying severity. While no indications of systematic or deliberate irregularities were reported, shortcomings in

ballot handling and counting, involvement of party observers in the counting process, and inconsistent adherence to procedures warrant attention.



Seven polling stations remained open beyond the scheduled closing time at 19:00. At five polling stations, closing was extended by between two and eleven minutes to compensate for delays in opening. At two other polling stations, closing was extended by between 20 and 40 minutes. Extensions followed earlier opening delays and technical issues involving ballot scanners and biometric devices. EDDA observers also reported that one polling station closed at 18:45, 15 minutes before closing time, reportedly because the polling station officials needed to vote. As a result, one person waiting in line was denied the opportunity to vote at that station.

Due to the lengthy counting processes, EDDA observers left most polling stations between 02:00 and 03:00 am and were therefore unable to observe the completion of the counting procedures at every polling station.

Technical equipment

The newly introduced election technologies, including biometric identification devices and ballot scanners, were generally functioning properly at the time of closing. In 11 polling stations, EDDA observers rated PSOs and operators' knowledge of the equipment as *good* or *very good*. In the remaining four polling stations, EDDA observers noted problems and a lack of knowledge among the operators regarding the technical procedures for closing.

The ballot scanner successfully printed and transmitted data for all levels of government in 14 of 15 observed polling stations. In the last polling station, the ballot scanner was unable to transmit the data because the device stopped functioning at approximately 19:00. The malfunction was attributed to overheating. Technical assistance was sought from an additional technician, but the last ballots that had been scanned were not deposited in the ballot box and were subsequently considered invalid, as they could not be scanned again.

Counting procedures

In 12 out of 15 observed polling stations, ballots were sorted and counted in accordance with established procedures. In the remaining three cases, verification procedures varied. In two polling stations, no second count of ballots was performed. In one polling station, a second count of ballots was performed only in cases of uncertainty about results.

Decisions on ballot validity were generally made in a reasonable and consistent manner, and the number of invalid ballots did not appear unreasonably high in any of the observed polling stations. Furthermore, there were no indications of deliberate miscounting, deliberate invalidation of valid votes, inaccurate reporting of results by PSOs, ballot box stuffing, or the adding of ballots to ballot boxes after the closing of the vote.

However, observer teams noted some irregularities. At one polling station, an unmarked ballot was included in the votes allocated to a political contestant and remained in that pile through repeated counts, despite uncertainty arising during the verification of the count against the machine receipt. Furthermore, at four polling stations, party observers were actively involved in the counting procedures. In one of these instances, a party observer handled ballots for their own party.

At one polling station, EDDA observers reported that the PSOs left, leaving the president of the polling station alone to do a second counting of all ballots and completing the protocol by herself, with the president expressing being overwhelmed, not having the necessary training to handle the closing alone, and that she did not know of any contact person or resources for help.

CONCLUSION

Based on a limited number of observations made on election day in the electoral districts of Sarajevo, Zenica and Mostar, the delegation of the European Dialogue and Democracy Association assesses the general elections in Bosnia-Hercegovina on October 4, 2026, as calm and well administered at the polling station level in most observed cases, with procedures generally followed to a satisfying degree. Polling station officials demonstrated a high level of transparency and order, mostly receiving positive overall ratings from EDDA observers. At the same time, shortcomings were observed regarding the functioning of technical equipment, upholding the secrecy of the vote, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and the timely and orderly completion of closing and counting procedures.

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