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 **COALITION “POD LUPOM”– PRESS RELEASE**

 **Pre-election Period in BiH was Chaotic**

*At today’s press conference in Sarajevo, the Coalition for free and fair elections “Pod lupom”, which monitors the 2018 General Elections in BiH, presented the 2nd Preliminary Report on the long-term election observation during the period July 23 – October 1, 2018 and observation of the election campaign during the period September 7- October 1, 2018.***A record high number of electoral irregularities has been recorded since the Coalition started election observation activities (in 2014).** One gets the impression that political parties in this country do as they wish and that the law does not apply to them, like it applies to ordinary citizens. This is enabled by sluggishness of the election and investigation authorities in eliminating and processing electoral irregularities.

The Coalition's observers registered **hundreds of cases of electoral irregularities,** such as illegitimate pressure on voters, vote buying, threats of workplace firing or offers of new employment in exchange for a vote, misuse of public resources for the purpose of the campaign, voters' registers not being up to date in some municipalities, illicit trades of places within the polling station committees, prohibited paid political advertising prior to the start of the campaign (three times more than during the 2016 Local elections), and other types of irregularities.

In addition, the Coalition received many reports from citizens concerning various irregularities and election fraud. Having in mind that there were far more electoral irregularities, we can assess that the pre-election period in BiH was, to say the least, chaotic.

The Coalition's observers reported on the alleged **trade of places within polling station committees in 35 municipalities**. The Election Law of BiH prescribes that political subjects certified to participate in the elections may have only one representative in the polling station committee. The main goal of tampering with places within polling station committees is to manipulate the will of voters.

The most concerning is a massive **misuse of citizens’ personal data for the purpose of registering for voting by mail,** without their knowledge**.** Several hundreds of similar cases were registered, and they were forwarded subsequently to the competent Prosecutor's Office by the Election Commission. The enormous increase in the number of voters registered for voting by mail, especially in some municipalities and towns in BiH, surely is a signal for the competent authorities to deal thoroughly with this problem.

**At pre-election rallies, various types of irregularities in the election campaign were registered in as many as 227 cases**. Messages were mainly about pre-election promises, however, what also marked the campaign were mutual accusations and political subjects’ passing the buck, which was often on the verge of inappropriate language and distaste.

Misuse of official vehicles and/or security personnel for the purpose of the campaign of political subjects was registered in as many as 153 cases. The leaders on the list are: Milorad Dodik (30 cases); Željka Cvijanović (28 cases), Mladen Ivanić (20 cases), Bakir Izetbegović (10 cases) and Mirko Šarović and Petar Đokić (9 cases each).

Unfortunately, there has also been a note of some specific **calls to violence or discrimination against some individuals and groups,** which should also be treated seriously by the competent authorities. The most notable example is the pre-election rally in Gacko, during which the President of RS, Milorad Dodik, the candidate for the Presidency of BiH in the 2018 General Elections, publicly threatened citizens that they would get fired if they voted for SDS. Equally concerning are open calls and messages encouraging the examples of the violations of the law, misuse of public office and resources and mockery of citizens.

 **Deepening of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic divisions, instilling fear of** other and different remains to be the main characteristic of the election campaigns and programs in BiH. It is disappointing that political subjects that are currently in power or that were in power during the previous mandates, are still not able to look to the future, to offer prospects to BiH citizens and to provide specific solutions to the many accumulated problems.

**There is a note of misuse of public resources and/or public office for the purpose of the campaign,** such as misuse of public spending and other public resource, misuse of public companies and appointedpublic functions by political subjects or individuals/candidates in the elections. Of 52 recorded cases of the misuse of public funds, public companies or public office, the greatest number relates to SNSD (25), HDZ BiH (9), SDA (8), DNS, PDA and SDS (2 cases each ), ASDA, Naša stranka, SDP and SP (1 case each), and the cases mostly occur in Republika Srpska.

**With some slight deviations in the implementation of electoral preliminary activities, the election authorities at the local level for the most part carried out adequately the preparations for administration of elections. However, the events regarding the CEC and incidents in some municipalities undermine citizens' confidence in the election authorities.**
**All said is one reason more for citizens to get out and vote in the greatest number possible and sanction the instructors and perpetrators of the electoral irregularities and violations of the law. Citizens' votes on the Election day will be protected by a great number of domestic and international non-partisan election observers, which ultimately, along with a responsible work of individuals who participate in organization and administration of elections, compliance with the law and election regulations, can ensure that the election results are a true expression of the will of citizens. Citizens should know that on Election Day they can vote freely and wisely in a voting booth, because there is no way that any political subject can find out how they voted, regardless of what the political subjects claim or what forms of pressure they use.**

The Coalition “Pod lupom” calls on all BiH citizens, regardless of whether they have residence in BiH or in some other country to check where they are registered to vote by visiting the CEC's web page www.izbori.ba . Any potential misuse of personal data for the purpose of election fraud can be reported to the police, the CEC and the Coalition “Pod lupom” via the web page or by calling the toll-free number 080 05 05 05.

63 long-term observers of the Coalition “Pod lupom” have worked in the field since July 15 to observe the work and sessions of the local election commissions, the activities anticipated in the election calendar and compliance with deadlines, electoral irregularities as well as to monitor media reporting. 42 observers monitored the election campaign.

 The Coalition “Pod lupom”

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