***Sarajevo,***

***Press release***

 *Press release/Coalition „Pod lupom“: It will take a lot of effort for better elections in B&H*

The Coalition for Free and Fair Elections "Pod lupom", which is observing the pre-election period in BiH together with 85 CSOs and informal groups, presented at today's press conference in Sarajevo the First Preliminary Report on Long-term Observation of the 2020 Local Elections, covering the period September 07 through October 11 2020. One hundred Long-term Observers (LTOs) of the Coalition "Pod lupom" are submitting their reports on a weekly basis on activities in the field. So far, LTOs submitted a total of 711 reports on key issues.

Over the period September 07 through October 11 2020, observers of the Coalition "Pod lupom" recorded a total of 538 different election irregularities. The highest number of election irregularities refers to 185 cases of premature election campaign detected in 59 municipalities/cities in BiH and 105 cases of abuse of public resources and/or functions for the purpose of the election campaign detected in 35 municipalities/cities.

The analysis of the submitted reports pertaining to the premature, legally- prohibited campaign shows that the highest number of irregularities in this sphere refers to the political entities as follows: SDA (17), SNSD (12), SDP (7), SDS (7) and HDZ (7) whilst submitted reports of irregularities pertaining to the cases of abuse of public resources are mostly relating to political entities as follows: SNSD (18), SDA (14), SDS Semberija (4), SDS (4) and SDP (4).

"Election Law of BiH defines the election campaign as a period of 30 days before the Election Day in which political entities present their programs and candidates for the upcoming elections to the voters and the public. The election campaign for the 2020 Local Elections begins tomorrow, on October 16. Up until this date, any paid public advertising is prohibited, as well as all pre-election activities of political entities, except to hold internal meetings of bodies and statutory bodies of political entities. The Coalition "Pod lupom" reported numerous cases of premature campaign to the Central Election Commission of BiH (CEC BiH)" - said Jelena Tanasković-Mićanović, Coordinator for Public Policies of the Coalition "Pod lupom".

One specific irregularity that certainly marked the previous election period is the theft of identity and misuse of personal data of citizens for the purpose of voting by mail. As opposed to election cycles that took place over the last 6 years, during this election cycle the CEC BiH has received a record number of applications for voting by mail - close to 130,000 requests. The number of rejected requests has also reached a record. Observers of the Coalition "Pod lupom“ reported a total of 36 different cases on misuse of personal data for voting by mail detected in 23 municipalities and cities in BiH. The Coalition "Pod lupom" received information on 5 different cases of possible misuse of personal data of citizens to register to vote by mail that are pertaining to hundreds of voters. The Coalition "Pod lupom" informed the CEC BiH on this situation.

The practice to trade seats in polling station committees continues over the course of this election cycle as well. Observers of the Coalition „Pod lupom“ reported allegations on 19 cases on trade of the seats on the polling station committees detected in 15 different municipalities and cities.

Although illegal in its nature, complaints of pressure on voters and allegations of vote-buying on elections in BiH have already become a common practice. Observers of the Coalition „Pod lupom“ reported 19 such cases in 15 municipalities and cities. These cases refer to allegations of offering money in exchange for votes, pressure on employees in public companies, etc. Rumors of vote-buying have been recorded in several municipalities where amounts of vote-buying range from 50 to 150 KM. LTOs have noted a worrying and increased practice that such talks and agreements are generally accepted and that citizens have no compunction to sell their votes. Social media are widely used considering this irregularity as well, in terms of being used by people to offer money in exchange for a vote.

Hate speech was recorded in 17 cases in 14 municipalities/cities. The abuse of the social network Facebook to perform inappropriate speech was particularly represented, especially by candidates from political entities. A case that has attracted a huge public attention is a video broadcast by the political entity "Ujedinjena Srpska", in which members of the constituent peoples and minorities in BiH are portrayed in a stereotypical and insulting way.

"Coordinated attacks by political parties on the independent and non-partisan character of the election observation mission of the Coalition "Pod lupom", in the form to attempt to infiltrate party activists into Coalition's non-partisan observers, were recorded. The Coalition "Pod lupom" strongly condemns this practice performed by certain political parties" - added Jelena Tanasković-Mićanović.

LTOs of the Coalition "Pod lupom" also observe the work of the local election administration and generally they have a correct collaboration with Local Election Commissions (LECs).

Four LECs are incomplete in its composition, although there is only one month left until Election Day. These are: Bosansko Grahovo, Pelagićevo, Teslić and Vukosavlje, while 14 LECs did not comply with the Law on Gender Equality ( 7 LECs to the detriment of women and 7 LECs to the detriment of men).

All LECs have adopted the Procedure Book on the work of the Local Election Commission, and 77 LECs, or 53.8% of the total number of LECs, have appointed a secretary, which is an increase compared to the 2018 General Elections. Most election commissions hold their regular weekly meetings, while the Election Commission of the Municipality of Pale (FBiH) held only one meeting during the period covered by this report. Seven (7) LECs are facing difficulties in its work in terms of inadequate working conditions, which is alarming from the aspect of successful organization of 2020 Local Elections in these municipalities and cities. The Voter Registration Center is available to citizens in all municipalities/cities.

Observers of the Coalition "Pod lupom" reported that 18 specific written objections on election process were filed to LECs in 16 municipalities and cities. These objections are pertaining to the process of selecting for polling station committee members and registration of voters for voting by mail.

"Since 2020 Local elections were called, the CEC BiH held more than 40 sessions. The sessions are open to the public and broadcast live via the official You Tube channel. The proactiveness of the CEC BiH in its efforts to restore the shaky confidence of BiH citizens in the elections, through increased transparency and timely consideration of observed irregularities, encourages and represents a positive change compared to the previous years "- said Dario Jovanović, Project Manager of the Coalition "Pod lupom."

Ongoing activities of the Coalition "Pod lupom" are being implemented through the STEP project, with funds provided by the European Union and co-financed by the United States Government and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The STEP project strengthens the role and capacity of BiH civil society and citizens to effectively support democratization processes by contributing to free and fair elections in BiH. As part of the mission of civic, non-partisan observation of the 2020 Local Elections, the Coalition "Pod lupom" plans to engage 3,000 non-partisan, civic observers of the Election Day at polling stations throughout BiH.

"The goal of the Coalition "Pod lupom " is to provide free and fair elections. The goal of the Coalition "Pod lupom" is to protect the votes of the citizens - voters. We are not interested in the election results - we are interested in these results to be a real reflection of the electoral will of the BiH's citizens, and we have been devotedly working for six years to achieve this goal", added Dario Jovanović.

The Coalition "Pod lupom" use this opportunity to invite all political entities to respect and follow election rules while implementing election campaign that starts tomorrow, and appeals for these local elections to take place in a democratic atmosphere, peacefully and with dignity. The Coalition "Pod lupom" invites the citizens to turn out and vote. Observers of the Coalition "Pod lupom" will do their best to ensure that the right of citizens to turn out and vote is not violated by no entity.

The Coalition “Pod lupom” use this opportunity to remind the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina that all election irregularities may be reported to the Coalition "Pod lupom" via a tool-free telephone number 080 05 05 05 or via the website of the Coalition [www.podlupom.org](http://www.podlupom.org)