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**COALITION POD LUPOM – PRESS RELEASE**

**Pod Lupom Coalition Presents New Findings: High Number of Reports on Trading Seats within Polling Station Committees**

*The Coalition for free and fair elections “Pod Lupom” that together with 85 civil society organizations and informal groups observe the pre-election period in BiH has presented today, in an online press conference, the results of its long-term observation of the 2020 Local Election in BiH for the period 7 September-25 October 2020. One hundred long-term observers report on a weekly basis on the activities in the field and until now they sent 997 regular reports with key findings and held 1130 meetings with various actors of the election process.*

As part of the long-term observation effort from 7 September to 25 October 2020 the Coalition’s observers registered 880 election irregularities. The largest number of irregularities related to the premature election campaigning. The Pod Lupom Coalition received reports of 242 such cases in 65 municipalities in BiH, followed by 117 cases referring to the work of civil servants in the election campaign in 41 municipalities, and 101 cases of misuse of the public resources in 45 municipalities.

The Coalition registered 59 cases of personal data abuse, 50 cases referring to trading seats on the polling station committees, 50 cases of biased media reporting and 43 cases of pressure on voters in 29 municipalities/towns in BiH.

The Coalition's observers registered 32 cases of inciting ethnic, religious or other intolerance and exposure of media or NGOs to pressure in 25 municipalities. In 7 municipalities (Srebrenica, Nevesinje, Trnovo (FBiH), Bratunac, East Drvar, Višegrad and Žepče), the observers registered reports of substantial registration or deregistration of voters, which may indicate electoral engineering. Substantial registration or deregistration of voters imply changes in the electorate +-5% in the number of voters. Of other reported irregularities, 88 refer to omissions in the work of the local election commissions and 66 cases referring to other types of irregularities.

Trading seats on the polling station committees is key irregularity taking place in this period. There are suspicions that we have more phantom than authentic political subjects competing in the elections. For example, Doboj, the town with approximately 63 000 registered voters, has 87 political subjects certified for elections – one political subject for every 730 voters. Research studies show that as many as 70% of these political subjects are phantom subjects whose goal is not to win votes.

*“The Election Law of BiH clearly provides that political subjects certified for participation in elections shall have only one representative on the polling station committee. Despite this clear provision of the law, political subjects are frequently reaching out for various means to secure as many seats on the polling station committees as possible. Primarily, they do this in two ways: 1) by registering phantom political parties or independent candidates whose aim is not to win the votes but rather to win a seat on the polling station committee for the political subjects that has registered them, 2) by directly trading or buying seats on the polling station committees from the political subjects that do not have strong interests in a certain basic electoral unit“, said Dario Jovanović, Project Manager of the Pod Lupom Coalition.*

In addition, some local communities have many independent candidates or exclusively local political parties that have only one candidate running in the elections. For example, Čapljina Independent Party – Čapljina in the Heart is certified for participation in 12 basic electoral units. The party has only one candidate in 11 basic electoral units. Alliance for Stari grad from Sarajevo certified the lists with only one candidate in 9 out of 13 municipalities/towns in Tuzla Canton i.e., 14 municipalities and towns across BiH with only one candidate. Not one of these parties promotes its candidates outside those local communities from which they originally come. It will be interesting to see how many votes these parties and independent candidates will win or whether they will even vote for themselves.

The most drastic example of trading for seats on the polling station committees comes from Zvornik that has traditionally been the town with the largest number of cases of election fraud and election irregularities. There is evidence that SNSD holds all or the majority of seats on 15 polling station committees. It was registered that in Lukavac and Konjic SDA activists were appointed to the polling station committees on behalf of SNSD. In Konjic, it was registered that members of same families were appointed both as members and substitute members of the polling station committees.

Additionally, Pod Lupom received reports of seats trading on a mobile team in Čajniče and on the polling stations committees in Bosanski Novi resulting in a revolt by citizens in Bosanski Novi that launched a campaign to vote for those candidates who are on the lists without their knowledge, and with the purpose of trading for seats on the polling station committees.

*“Pod Lupom Coalition will forward all reported election irregularities to the Central Election Commissions of Bosnia and Herzegovina for further action, and in the case of suspected criminal act they will be forwarded to the competent Prosecutor’s Office” –* added Dario Jovanović.

The Coalition's long-term observers also monitor the work and sessions of the local election commissions as well as their activities set in the election calendar and compliance with respective deadlines. Two local election commissions - Pelagićevo and Vukosavalje - do not operate in full capacity (vacant seats) even though there are only 15 days left until elections.

Six (6) local election commissions (Bihać, Eastern Novo Sarajevo, Ribnik, Sanski Most, Višegrad and Vukosavlje) pointed out the lack of adequate work resources.

Thirteen (13) local election commissions fail to comply with the gender equality provision of the law - six (6) to the detriment of women and seven (7) to the detriment of men.

All local election commissions have Rules of Procedure, and 80 election commissions have appointed secretary and/or technical secretary, which is an increase compared to the 2018 election.

*“It raises concern that the deadlines in the CEC's election calendar are increasingly being violated by the local election commissions as election day is coming closer, even though they were strictly observed in the beginning. The Voter Register Center is not available to citizens in Ključ; the local election commissions in Bosansko Grahovo, Laktaši and Stolac have failed to pass a decision on the appointment of members of the polling station committees by the deadline of 16 October 2020. Even though obligated under the law, the local commissions in at least 18 municipalities and towns in BiH failed to disclose names and surnames of members of the polling stations committees including information about their affiliation to political subject. Public disclosure of the names and surnames of members of the polling stations committees with information about their affiliation to political subjects was recommended by the Pod Lupom Coalition and has been in effect since the 2018 General Elections. It is a precondition for proving the trade of seats on the polling station committees that directly violate the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* said Hasan Kamenjaković, the Coalition's Public Relations and Media Coordinator.

Over the course of the reporting period, complaints were made to the local election commissions in 31 municipalities. The largest number of complaints refer to the appointment of members of the polling station committees.

The current activities of the Pod Lupom Coalition are implemented under STEP project that is funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Government of the United States of America and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). STEP project strengthens the role and capacities of BiH civil society and citizens to support the democratization processes to contribute to free and fair elections in BiH. The Coalition plans as part of the citizens non-partisan observation of the 2020 Local elections to deploy on Election day 3 000 non-partisan observers to the polling stations across BiH.

“*The goal of the Pod Lupom Coalition is free and fair elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The goal is to protect the votes of citizens voters. We are not interested in election results; our interest is that the election results are the real reflection of our fellow citizens’ will and this has been the goal to which we have been committed over the past six years“* – added Hasan Kamenjaković.

The Pod Lupom Coalition calls on all political subjects to comply with the electoral rules in their campaign and urge that these local elections take place in a democratic, peaceful, and dignified manner. The Pod Lupom Coalition calls on citizens to exercise their right to vote. Pod Lupom observers will do everything in their power to make sure that no one undermines their right to vote.

We remind the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina that all election irregularities can be reported to Pod Lupom Coalition via our toll free number 080 05 05 05 or via our webpage [www.podlupom.org](http://www.podlupom.org).

*For all additional information please contact PR coordinator of the Coalition “Pod lupom” Hasan Kamenjaković via e-mail* *pr@podlupom.org* *or by calling 033 268 160 and 063 396 521.*