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**COALITION POD LUPOM“ –PRESS RELEASE**

**Coalition Pod Lupom To Cover All Polling Stations in Mostar on Election Day**

The Coalition for Free and Fair Elections “Pod lupom” presented its Preliminary report on the long-term observation of the local elections in Mostar for the period 5 October – 14 December 2020 at today’s press conference in Mostar.

Long-term observers (LTOs) in Mostar monitored the work of the City Election Commission, observance of the deadlines set forth in the electoral calendar, recorded and filed electoral irregularities and fraud, observed election campaigns and media reporting, and worked to prepare Election Day observers.

The LTOs report on their activities on a weekly basis and hold regular meetings with various actors in the electoral process (election administration, political subjects, institutions, police authority, civil society organisations, media, etc.) in order for assessment of the electoral process to be as objective as possible.

The Coalition's observers reported 18 electoral irregularities in the Mostar local election race. These irregularities refer to 9 cases of premature campaign (SDA, DF, and SDP two cases each, and one case for HDZ BiH, Party for BiH and SBB), misuse of the public resources in 5 cases, public speech that can be characterised as inappropriate in 4 cases.

The misuse of the public resources relate to intensified public infrastructure works, frequent and intensified visits by higher-level public officials to local representatives of their political parties. The reports receivedrefer to the political subjects: SDA andSNSD, i.e. the list “Ostajteovdje-zajedno za našMostar“Stay here - together for our Mostar“. The cases in which SNSDofficials' givepresents to children were registered on two occasions during the pre-election activities, which was publicised, and which may represent misuse of children for political purposes.

*We found that what characterised the election campaign in Mostar was a strong ethnic polarisation and basing the campaign on raising interethnic tensions, calls for ethnic homogenisation under the pretext of the so called “dispersion of votes“. It was recorded that ministers in the Croatian Government repeatedly, both directly andindirectly, endorsed one political subject, HDZ BiH, openly calling citizens to vote for this political subject. Furthermore, it was recorded that the FBiH Prime Minister exclusively met the candidates of the Coalition for Mostar and their mayoral candidateacting in the capacity of his public function, and not the party function, as published on the web page of the SDA Mostar City Board, exclusively. These examples represent abuse of public office –*said Dario Jovanović, Pod lupom Coalition Project Manager.

The Coalition notes that the CEC of BiH registered a total of 3 985 voters for out-of-country voting, which is 5 times more than in the last local elections in the City of Mostar in 2008. Most of the voters registered to vote by mail come from the following countries: Germany (715), Serbia, (627), Norway (578), Sweden (411) and Croatia (378).

Inappropriate language was recorded in 4 cases. Representatives of political subjects and even journalists used offensive language and ethnic labelling when analysing political events, which supports our assessment that the campaign of certain political subjects mostly targeted the ethnicity emotionsof voters.

*The Coalition was contacted by an upset citizen of Mostar after she found promotional material in her mailbox that was identical to the ballot paper to be used on Election day. It was distributed by the Coalition for Mostar with instructions for how and for whom to vote. As regards this matter, the Coalition is in possession of Viber communication in which the SDA Mostar City Board Election Headquarters clearly indicates intention to come into possession of a ballot paper for electoral constituencies. The Coalition emphasises that there is no legal way for any political subject to come in possession of a ballot paper before the Election day. It is alarming if print copies of the ballot papers are circulating in the public before the Election day, because they may be abused on the very Election day*– added Dario Jovanović.

Analysis of the candidate lists in the Mostar elections shows the already seen situation where many political subjects that are certified for participation in the election race have only one candidate, which may lead to suspicion that this may be about trading seats on polling station committees. More specifically, 16 different political subjects have only one candidate at the level of the City electoral unit,even though they are certified for participation in the electoral constituencies.

The Coalition analysed the “critical polling stations“in the City of Mostar in the previous 2018 General elections in BiH. It showed certain indicative anomalies in the electoral process (for example, turnout higher than 80%, candidates with 100% preferential/personal votes) and the irregularities recorded in the reports of the Coalition’s nonpartisan observers from the previous elections. It raises concern that as many as 41 polling stations in Mostar (27% of the total number of regular polling stations) were assessed as “critical“ because of the mentioned indications.

Pod lupom monitored the work of the election administration, both the Central Election Commission and the Mostar City Election Commission.

*The CEC of BiH monitors the deadlines for organisation and conduct of electoral activities. However, a close attention should be paid to the CEC's changes concerning voting of persons who tested positive for Covid 19 or are in isolation, who are allowed to cast their votes via a special mobile team if in their request that they submit to the local election commissions they also include relevant documents issued by the competent authority,i.e. medical certificate confirming that they tested positive for Covid 19 or an order of isolation. Taking into account voters' experiences in the November 15 local elections in terms of practical application of this Instruction, there is concern that a number of Mostar voters will be affected because of the slowness of the processor because the Covid-19 mobile team may not appear at the given address*– said Jelena TanaskovićMićanović, Public Policy Coordinator with the Coalition “Pod lupom“.

The City Election Commission has 7 members, and it operates in its full capacity. The Commissionmeets the gender requirement, as provided for by the Election Law of BiH.

According to LTOs' reports, the Mostar City Election Commission implements the activities related to preparation and organisation of elections in accordance with the calendar of electoral activities. *Instruction on the method of work and reporting of election commission of basic constituency in Bosnia and Herzegovina*closely prescribes the functioning of the local election commissions. The instruction prescribes, inter alia, adoption of Rules of Procedures for local election commission, which was observed by the City Election Commission of Mostar. The City Election Commission has a Secretary, which is a possibility provided in the Instruction.

*The City Election Commission published a list of the appointed members of the polling station committees on the bulletin board. The wayin which the decision was composed, i.e. placing codes of the political subjects instead of names of the political subjects prevents the public and voters from having insight in party membership/affiliation of members of the polling station committees. The Decision should be modified to stipulate disclosure of names of the political subjects and not their codes in order to contribute to transparency of the electoral process. The Coalition will, therefore, disclose the names of all appointed members of the polling station committees including the names of the political subjects they are representing -*added Jelena Tanasković.

The Coalition's observers recorded that two complaints were filed with the Mostar City Election Commission – one for premature campaign and the other one referred to appointment of the polling station committee, which was rejected as unjustified.

The Coalition Pod lupom commented the specificity of the voting process for the Mostar City Council and the election rules that are different than the rules applicable in the remaining 142 local communities in BiH. The voters in the City of Mostar will have 7 different ballot papers on Election Day. Each voter will get two ballot papers, both for the City Council. The ballot papers will be distributed in 7 electoral units from which 35 councillors are to be elected, of which at least 4 and the most 15 may be from the same constituent people.

*We call on all Mostar citizens to comply with the epidemiological measures and recommendations and exercise their right to vote, as that is the best way to protect their ballot from being abused or to prevent electoral irregularities. The Coalition Pod lupom is by your side and will have election observers at all regular polling stations in Mostar, including the City Election Commission. Our observers will do their best to protect your vote from abuse -* said Hasan Kamenjaković, Pod Lupom PR Coordinator.

The Coalition reminds all citizens that they can report observed electoral irregularities online via [www.podlupom.org](http://www.podlupom.org)or via thetoll-free number 080 05 05 05.

*For all information, please contact the Coalition's Public Relations Coordinator Hasan Kamenjakovićat* *pr@podlupom.org**or via telephone at 063 396 521.*