

**FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BOSNIAN CITIZENS:  
CROSS-ENTITY CIVIC COALITION REPORTS ON  
SEPTEMBER 1998 ELECTIONS IN BOSNIA**

Western diplomats and international analysts have had their say about the recent elections in Bosnia, but few forums exist for Bosnian citizens to share their own assessment of the electoral process. More than 2,400 citizens from local women's groups, pensioner associations, student unions, and community organizations across Bosnia Hercegovina (BiH) came out in force this year to monitor the September 1998 elections. This unprecedented citizen effort culminated in a Unified Final Report written by nonpartisan monitors -- Serb, Muslim and Croat-- thereby marking BiH's most comprehensive domestic monitoring effort to date. These citizens are making their views and opinions heard in BiH, and signaling that citizens are willing and ready to take ownership of their country's electoral processes.

In July 1998, NDI launched its Domestic Election Monitoring Program in BiH to assist interested civic groups in organizing regionally-coordinated efforts to monitor the nationwide September 1998 elections. NDI's objective was to develop the capacity of non-governmental organizations to collaborate on the organization of grassroots campaigns and to enhance the credibility of the non-governmental sector in BiH. The overarching goal was to increase cooperation among citizen groups, and to bolster public confidence, Bosnian ownership and citizen participation in the political process.

The attached "Unified Final Report of Observations for the Elections in Bosnia and Hercegovina," was prepared by NDI's local partners: Forum for Democracy, Sarajevo; League for Election Monitoring, Mostar; Election Monitoring League, Tuzla; and Citizen's Monitoring of Elections, Banja Luka. The findings and recommendations outlined in this report are those of the Bosnian coalitions which organized the domestic election monitoring efforts and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Democratic Institute.

Bosnian groups document their extraordinary involvement in the electoral process in the attached report. Civic groups engaged in coalition building, training seminars, media and public relations efforts, election day monitoring and post-election reporting and press events. Although, NDI staff provided technical assistance, coalitions were responsible for election day logistics and organization of post-election reporting. In the end, associations, NGO's and civic groups enhanced their organizational capacity as well as established a network representing a broad-base of citizens throughout the region.

Perhaps the most impressive component of the monitoring effort is the diverse background of citizen involvement. NDI, along with its local NGO partner the Centers for Civic Initiative, helped build the four multiethnic coalitions--in Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo and Tuzla--which comprised 110 civic groups, NGOs and associations representing a wide cross-section of the population (a complete list of participating civic groups is outlined below in the regional coalition final report).

The 1998 domestic monitoring effort illustrates the commitment of citizen involvement in the electoral process. In a lessons-learned

the development of a permanent electoral law in Bosnia is at the forefront of the coalitions' agenda. As outlined in the attached report, coalition groups see the necessity for citizen involvement in the shaping of a permanent electoral law, and will focus on gathering citizen input into the drafting process. Long-term activities will include preparation for municipal elections tentatively scheduled for Fall 1999. Coalitions are interested in monitoring the elections with expanded coverage and organizing pre-election activities to include voter education, extended media campaigns and broader post-election reporting. Indeed, the people of Bosnia are taking ownership of the democratic process in their own communities.

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## **Unified Final Report of Observations For the Elections in Bosnia and Hercegovina**

**Liga za Pracenje Izboru, Mostar**  
**Citizen's Monitoring of Elections, Banja Luka**  
**Liga za Pracenje Izboru, Tuzla**  
**Forum for Democracy, Sarajevo**

***Sarajevo September 1998***

**The joint final report was made on the basis of original final reports from:**

League for Election Monitoring, Mostar  
Citizen's Monitoring of Elections, Banja Luka  
League for Election Monitoring, Tuzla  
Forum for Democracy, Sarajevo

**Members of the League for Election Monitoring, Mostar are:**

Sparks of Life, Prozor-Rama  
Local Red Cross – Doljani, Jablanica  
Young Bridge, Mostar  
Under the Same Sun, Jablanica  
Friends, Kostajonica Konjic  
With Heart, Mostar  
Swiss House, Mostar  
Association of Citizen Pensioners, Konjic  
Association of Citizen Pensioners, Jablanica  
Union of Students, Mostar  
Women of Mostar  
Feet of Hope Bijelo Polje, Mostar  
Women of Konjic  
Centers for Civic Initiative

**Members of the coalition Citizen's Monitoring of Elections, Banja Luka are NGOs and informal groups of citizens from:**

**Banja Luka:**

Centers for Civic Initiative  
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly  
Women's Section – Army of Republika Srpska  
Union of Women of the City of Banja Luka

Women's Action - Vidra

Association MOST

Association of Women-Duga

Citizens' Esperanto Association La Mondo

Group of citizens from community centers of Karanovic, Srpske  
Toplice and Rosulje

### **Bijeljina**

Citizens' Voice

Helsinki Board for Human Rights

Women's Association "Hope"

Golden Autumn

### **Celinac**

Association of Women

Group of citizens from the community centers of Josalka, Stara  
Dubrava and Branasci

### **Doboj**

Citizens' Voice

Golden Autumn

Bona Vita

Association of Teachers

Our Children

Vucjak Podnovlje

### **Kozarska Dubica**

Association of Women – Majka Knezopolijka

Group of citizens from the community centers of Knezica, and  
Demirovac

### **Laktasi**

DOC

Group of citizens from the community centers of Aleksandrovac, Trn  
and Maglajani

### **Modrica**

Buducnost (Future)

Zdravo da ste

### **Mrkonjic Grad**

Youth Organization

Group of citizens from the community centers of Bjelajci and Podbrdo

### **Prijedor**

Citizens' Voice

Dobrotvor

Sanus

Zdravo da ste

Golden Autumn

Group of citizens from the community centers of Urije, Orlovci,  
Petrovo and Rakelici

Youth Organization Krug

**Srpski Brod**

Scout Squad Petar Kocic

**Srpski Sanski Most**

Association of Women Lana

**Sipovo**

Youth Organization  
Association of Women  
Group of Citizens

**Teslic**

Youth Union

**Srbac**

Group of citizens from the community centers of Kukulja

**Jezero**

Group of Citizens

**Novi Grad**

Group of citizens from the community centers of Dobrljin, Svodna, Rudica and Vodicevo

**Gradiska**

Group of Citizens

**Kotor Varos**

Group of citizens from the community center of Grabovica

**Derventa**

Group of Citizens

**Samac**

Group of Citizens

**Members of the League for Election Monitoring Tuzla are:**

Land Mine Survivors' Network

War Military Invalids - Kalesija  
Union of Veterans, JOB- Kalesija  
Office for Human Rights, Youth Section "Y" Tuzla  
Association of Soldiers -Zivinice  
Forum of Women, Gracanica  
Serb Civic Council – GRP Tuzla  
Centers for Civic Initiatives  
Board of Women - UMBIT  
Association of Citizens for Development of Democratic Civil Society  
"Demokrat" –Stupari  
Center for Women, Dona Zar  
Association of Citizen Pensioners – Srebrenik  
Organization of Sehid Families and those of Fallen Soldiers  
Children's Land  
Association of Pensioners Tuzla  
Association of Women – Tuzla  
Organization of War Military Invalids "Sons of Bosnia" – Lukavac  
BOSPO  
VESTA  
Forum of Citizens – Gradacac  
Red Cross –Srebrenik  
Organization of Demobilized Soldiers' Tuzla  
Committee for Human Rights  
Organization of Women Bosniaks -Gracanica  
Organization of Civilian Invalids –Tuzla

**Members of the Forum for Democracy, Sarajevo are:**

Union of Women - Zar  
Center for Peace  
Association of Pensioners of the Federation of BiH  
Association of Citizens, "Warm House"  
CIP  
Serb Civic Council –GPR, BiH  
IMC

**Our goals are:**

Organization of election monitoring  
Reporting results of election monitoring  
Watching for violations of electoral rules and regulations  
Increasing trust in the electoral process  
Achieving general democratization  
Gathering NGOs to undertake concrete initiatives  
Increasing the public profile of NGOs and protecting the interests of members of NGOs  
Involving citizens who are not political party members in the process of democratization.  
Outreach to citizens to involve them in democratic changes.

**Principles of our work are:**

Non-partisan and non-governmental action  
Non-profit status  
Responsibility and objectivity  
Transparency and independence  
Multiethnicity, and equality on the basis of sex, age and location  
Equality of NGOs in the process of election monitoring

**METHODS**

Considering that, to strengthen democracy, it is necessary to involve as many NGOs and citizens as possible, we decided to organize citizen election monitoring. We invited all interested citizens and

designated responsibilities, as follows: planning and recruiting, designing materials, coordinating and writing grant proposals, and outreach.

Individual NGOs, as well as the working groups, recruited volunteers. The coalitions created materials, including posters and brochures and held regional press conferences, at which we presented our project and invited citizens to join us. Election monitors attended trainings at which they signed a pledge containing a code of conduct for monitors. The trainings were conducted by coordinators who were themselves previously trained by NDI-CCl. In addition to training the monitors, the coordinators were responsible for coordinating a certain number of polling stations as well as visiting those places, to ensure that everything was in place in the field. During training, volunteer-monitors received information on voting and counting and on aspects of these processes to which they should pay particular attention. The monitors studied a monitoring manual, which they also used to report what they saw. Thus prepared, and with badges indicating their affiliations with NGO monitoring groups, and OSCE accreditations the monitors went to the polling stations September 12th and 13th.

We managed to recruit 2,479 volunteers-monitors who covered 865 polling stations throughout BiH. Our monitors were present in the majority of polling stations, working in two shifts. Coordinators visited polling stations where our monitors were present.

Two days after the closing of the polling stations each group held a press conference. They presented their preliminary reports and announced plans to prepare final regional reports and a national report for all of BiH.

## **SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS**

The first thing our monitors observed was late delivery of the Final Voter Registers (FVRs) in all four regions. This often led to huge numbers of people voting by tendered ballot. In the 865 polling stations we covered, a total of 43,500 tendered ballots were cast. Final Voter Registers were also incomplete. Our monitors also observed a large number of invalid ballots, about 3,000 in Hercegovina-Neretva canton, about 17,500 in the Banja Luka area, about 15,000 in Tuzla-Podrinje canton and about 12,000 in Sarajevo canton, a total of about 47,500.

We were surprised to see that a large number of people did not know how to mark the ballot. According to our monitors' reports, the number of people needing help was over 19,100. Our monitors observed political party propaganda inside and within 50 meters of polling places in all four regions. One quite serious type of violation observed by our monitors was cases of one person marking the ballot for a number of voters.

In certain polling stations we also saw serious violations of electoral rules during the counting process. This was especially pronounced in one polling station in Hercegovina-Neretva canton. We also observed a mistake in OSCE materials in Brcko, where candidate Vladimir Gojer was identified as an SDS candidate instead of as an SDP candidate.

In sum, our monitors' observations indicate that these incidents were isolated; thus, we conclude that they could not have greatly influenced the results of the elections. Our monitors did observe that

Our monitors were dissatisfied with the use of pencils in the voting and counting. We were concerned that this allowed for manipulation of votes. A similar situation occurred during the process of sorting and counting in Sarajevo, when forms were filled out in pencil.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Organizers of the elections should simplify the ballots and methods for marking ballots. In other words, previous systems of marking ballots by circling or making an "x" was much more effective. Better education of voters is also needed to reduce the number of invalid ballots, as the number of invalid ballots in these elections was high. We also recommend that the Final Voter Registers be finalized as early as possible.
2. The flow of information inside the election-organizing system should be improved. Many polling station committees were not informed of the presence of domestic monitors, although all relevant authorities were eventually informed in time.
3. We point out the incompleteness and late arrival of the FVRs on the first day of elections. Organizers of the elections should do everything they can to ensure that FVRs are completed, in alphabetical order and delivered on time to polling stations.
4. If international supervisors are present at the next elections they should be well trained, authoritative and dedicated to ensuring free and fair elections.
5. Permanent electoral rules should be more specific, all materials related to the elections are uniform throughout BiH and all election materials should be printed one month early. The deadline for filing complaints should be extended. Pencils should not be used in the next elections. The NGO sector should be more actively involved in creating electoral rules and regulations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

General opinion holds that the recent elections represent a step towards normalization of society. The fact that the election was held without major incidents indicates people's readiness to solve problems in a democratic way. Our involvement during the elections was necessary and important and achieved its purpose. Although the violations of election rules described above did not happen often enough to affect the fairness of the elections, some of them were very serious. We would like to believe that our involvement, which is explained through this report, will lead to better organization and conduct of future elections.