

**INTERIM REPORT**  
**30 April–14 May 2024**

**17 May 2024**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- On 3 April 2024, due to the failure to form a majority in the Belgrade City Assembly following the 2023 elections, the Speaker of the Parliament called for new elections to be held on 2 June. Subsequently, following repeated demands of the opposition parties to hold partial local elections on the same day and extended negotiations, and on 26 April the Speaker of the Parliament called local elections where local elections had not been held in December 2023. These elections are taking place against the backdrop of continued dominance of the ruling party and the President, fragmentation of the opposition, entrenched polarization, and frequent early elections. Some opposition parties are boycotting the upcoming local elections while others decided to participate or condition their participation on the implementation of certain demands prior to the elections.
- Local elections are regulated by the Law on Local Elections (LLE), the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament (LEMP), and the Law on the Unified Voter Register (LUVR). On 2 May, a new parliamentary working group was established, comprising representatives from ruling and opposition parties and civil society, with a focus on prioritizing ODIHR recommendations relevant to the current electoral context. To date, apart from the amendments to the LUVR enacted on 10 May, no other changes applicable to these elections were adopted.
- Local elections are managed by Local Election Commissions (LECs) and Polling Boards (PBs). The Republic Election Commission has limited legal competence for local elections. LECs and PBs operate in a standing and an extended composition, with members nominated by the political groups represented in the local assembly and the submitters of candidate lists, respectively. Sessions of the LECs are public, and decisions must be published online within 24 hours. So far, despite the condensed timeframe, LECs have met all legal deadlines, and election preparations are underway.
- Citizens who are at least 18 years old on election day have the right to vote, except those fully deprived of legal capacity by a court decision. As of April 2024, some 4.2 million voters are registered in the territorial-administrative units where local elections will be held. Citizens can verify their records in the Unified Voter Register (UVR) and request corrections to their data. Several ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) interlocutors voiced concerns about the accuracy of the UVR due to alleged misuse of the UVR in the past. On 10 May, the LUVR was amended to address alleged organized voter migration related to the December 2023 elections. Following these amendments, voters will be included in the voter list according to their place of residence as of 3 July 2023.
- The signature collection and candidate registration period started with the call of the elections and ended on 12 May. Citizens eligible to vote may stand for councillor in the place where they are registered to vote. Candidate lists may be submitted to LECs by political parties, coalitions of political parties, or groups of citizens. Requests to register candidate lists must be supported by certified signatures from eligible voters. Voters may sign in support of only one candidate list. ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns about the potential use by some contestants of fraudulent signatures certified by municipal authorities as well as difficult access to certifying authorities for some opposition lists.

- Contestants are allowed to campaign from the call of the elections, while the law prescribes an official campaign period with equal campaign conditions in the media from the publication of the final candidate lists. Campaigning online is not regulated. Thus far, the ODIHR EOM has noted limited traditional in-person campaign activities. Contestants and political actors boycotting the elections are active on social media. Long-standing concerns related to possible vote-buying and pressure on public employees remain. The political discourse is dominated by national issues and the country's effort in dealing with geopolitical dynamics in the region and beyond, while local infrastructure issues also feature.
- Despite an increase in the number of women in parliament, women remain underrepresented in parliament and other decision-making positions. Women currently hold 10 of the 31 ministerial positions in the new government, some mayoral positions, and 95 of the 250 seats (38 per cent) in parliament, including the speaker, an increase from 87 in the previous parliament. The law prescribes a 40 per cent gender quota for candidate lists, with strict placement criteria.
- Contestants may finance their campaign from public and private funds. There are limits on the amount of individual donations and a ban on donations from certain sources, but no expenditure limit. The Agency for Prevention of Corruption (APC) is charged with overseeing campaign finance and preventing misuse of state resources. The APC has deployed 44 field monitors to collect field data on campaign expenditures. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors have voiced a lack of trust in the APC, due to its lack of proactive approach to properly investigate alleged violations.
- The media sector includes numerous outlets, despite a relatively small advertising market, but it grapples with financial vulnerability and political polarization. Challenges to the media environment include intimidation of journalists, political and economic influence over media, media ownership concentration, and inconsistent enforcement of legislation. Public-service media must offer contestants free and equal airtime. The Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM) is tasked with monitoring broadcasters' compliance with the legislation. On 7 May, the REM approved its new Rulebook for election media coverage, with minor revisions. Unlike in previous elections, the rulebook will apply to all broadcasters, not just public-service media.
- The Constitution recognizes 23 national minorities and foresees temporary special measures to ensure their political participation and representation. In municipalities where a national minority accounts for over 15 per cent of the local population, ballots and other election materials must also be produced in the language of the respective minority. Several national minority parties registered lists to contest these elections in municipalities with significant minority populations.
- The law grants broad legal standing to list submitters, but the possibility to file complaints by other interested parties is narrower and depends on the subject matter. The law prescribes timely electoral dispute resolution, but does not guarantee of a public court hearing. As of 11 May, 95 complaints had been filed, all related to candidate registration. Most of these argued that President Aleksandar Vučić acting as list leader of the SNS is incompatible with his constitutional role; almost all of these complaints were rejected as falling outside the LECs' competences.
- The law provides for citizen and international observation of all stages of the election process. The two main civil-society observer organizations plan to observe the elections of the Belgrade City Assembly.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the authorities of the Republic of Serbia to observe the 2 June 2024 local elections, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 30 April.<sup>1</sup> The mission, led by Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, consists of an 11-member core team based in Belgrade and 18 long-term observers (LTOs) deployed on 8 May to eight locations around the country. Mission members come from 20 OSCE participating States. ODIHR has requested participating States to second 160 short-term observers to observe election-day proceedings.

## III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

On 3 April 2024, the Speaker of the National Assembly called for elections for the Belgrade City Assembly, due to the failure by the city council to form a majority after the 2023 elections.<sup>2</sup> Following repeated demands from opposition parties to hold local elections on the same day, and after extended talks between the political groups, the Speaker on 26 April called local elections for the 89 local assemblies where local elections had not been held in December 2023.

The political landscape is shaped by the continued dominance of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the incumbent President Aleksandar Vučić, fragmentation of the opposition, entrenched polarization, and frequent early elections.<sup>3</sup> In the 17 December 2023 early parliamentary elections the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)-led coalition won 129 of the 250 seats in the National Assembly.<sup>4</sup> The opposition coalition ‘Serbia Against Violence’ (SPN) received 65 seats, marking the best opposition coalition showing since 2012.<sup>5</sup> On 1 May, SNS formed a governing coalition with the SPS and three of the 12 MPs elected from national minority lists.

Early local elections were held in 2023 for 65 cities, municipalities and city municipalities, and the Belgrade City Assembly, concurrently with early parliamentary elections.<sup>6</sup> After the announcement of the election results, SPN organized large-scale protests, alleging electoral fraud and organized migration of voters to Belgrade.<sup>7</sup> They initially demanded new elections for the Belgrade City Assembly and all local assemblies in autumn along with full implementation of all previous ODIHR recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See previous [ODIHR election reports on Serbia](#).

<sup>2</sup> Following the 2023 elections, SNS obtained 49 of the 110 seats in the Belgrade City Assembly, falling short of a majority; by the legal deadline of 3 March, there was no quorum in the assembly and no working majority could therefore be established.

<sup>3</sup> The 17 December 2023 early parliamentary elections were the third parliamentary elections in less than four years and the sixth since 2012. The last two early parliamentary elections were held in response to demands of the opposition.

<sup>4</sup> Since 2012, SNS has won six parliamentary and three presidential elections.

<sup>5</sup> In addition, the HOPE coalition (NADA) won 13 seats, Voice of the People – 13, and national minority parties – 12 (Hungarians – 6 seats, Bosniaks and Croats – 2, Bosniaks – 2, Albanians – 1, and Russians – 1). The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) won 18 seats.

<sup>6</sup> On 21 June 2020, concurrently with parliamentary elections, local elections were held in almost all municipalities. Elections for the Belgrade City Assembly were last held in April 2022 and December 2023.

<sup>7</sup> SPN comprised the Justice and Freedom Party (SSP), Peoples’ Movement of Serbia (NPS), Green-left Front (ZLF), Don’t Let Belgrade Drown, Ecological Uprising (EU), Democratic Party (DS), Movement of Free Citizens (PSG), Serbia Centre (SRCE), Zajedno (Together), Movement for Reversal (PZP), United Trade Unions (SLOGA), and the New Face of Serbia (NLS).

<sup>8</sup> The European Parliament resolution and United Nations Human Rights Committee voiced concerns over alleged voting irregularities in the December 2023 elections. See the [European Parliament resolution of 8 February 2024](#) and the [EU 2023 Serbia Progress Report](#). In the concluding [observations](#) of the UN Human Rights Committee, issued on 28 March 2024, the ‘Committee noted with concern credible reports about numerous irregularities in the parliamentary and local elections held in December 2023, including abuse of public resources, intimidation and pressure on voters, cases of vote-buying, and stuffing of ballot boxes and called on the State party to undertake prompt, thorough and independent investigation of all allegations of irregularities, strengthen oversight of election campaigns and conduct comprehensive voter education programmes.’”

In a welcome step towards an inclusive dialogue, following the invitation of the Speaker of parliament, all parliamentary political parties held discussions with the stated aim to implement ODIHR recommendations within the National Assembly. The invitation to attend was also extended for the first time to several civil society organizations. The discussions centered around opposition demands to establish a commission to audit the Unified Voter Register (UVR), equal access to the media, and the simultaneous holding of elections. While the Speaker initially accepted only first two requests, after continued political negotiations the decision was made to hold all elections on the same date.<sup>9</sup> On 19 April, some opposition parties of the SPN coalition decided on their participation in the upcoming elections, with some parties opting to boycott and others conditioning their participation upon disallowing voters to vote in their new residence, if they moved within the last 12 months, and on increased access to the public broadcaster.<sup>10</sup>

Women hold 95 of the 250 seats (38 per cent) in parliament, including the speaker, an increase from 87 in the previous parliament; despite this increase, they remain underrepresented in parliament and other decision-making positions. Women hold 10 of the 31 ministerial positions in the new government (32 per cent), a decrease from the previous composition, including a deputy prime minister, and some mayoral positions.<sup>11</sup> Six of the 11 judges of the Constitutional Court, including the president, are women.

#### IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

These local elections are conducted to elect councillors for Belgrade and 14 other cities, 52 municipalities, and 23 city municipalities.<sup>12</sup> Local councillors are elected for four-year terms through a proportional representation system, and lists that receive over 3 per cent of all votes cast qualify for the seats.<sup>13</sup> Lists representing national minorities are exempt from the threshold requirement.

Serbia is party to international and regional instruments related to holding democratic elections.<sup>14</sup> Local elections are primarily regulated by the 2022 Law on Local Elections (LLE) and the 2009 Law on the Unified Voter Register (LUVR). For matters not specifically regulated by the LLE, provisions of the 2022 Law on the Election of Members of Parliament (LEMP), and decisions and instructions of the Republic Election Commission (REC) adopted based on the LEMP apply, which LECs should apply.<sup>15</sup> In practice, implementation of specific provisions in the LEMP not covered by the LLE may pose

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<sup>9</sup> On 23 April, LLE was amended to allow for holding elections in the 89 municipalities on 2 June.

<sup>10</sup> On 9 March, on the initiative of the CSO ProGlas, opposition parties signed an agreement on conditions for honest, fair and free elections.

<sup>11</sup> Including the mayors of Niš, Kruševac, Vršac, Užice, the presidents of the municipalities of Alibunar, Apatin, Babušnica, Bački Petrovac, Bela Crkva, Beočin, Brus, Čičevac, Čoka, Kovin, Ruma, Sremska Mitrovica, Surdulica, Trstenik, Varvarin, Bajina Bašta, and the head of the Danube district.

<sup>12</sup> Local self-government in Serbia is organized into 29 cities, including the capital Belgrade, and 145 municipalities. Five cities (Belgrade, Niš, Požarevac, Užice and Vranje) are further subdivided into city municipalities. The City of Belgrade contains within its administrative borders 17 city municipalities.

<sup>13</sup> If no electoral list surpasses this threshold, then all lists that received votes participate in the distribution of seats.

<sup>14</sup> Including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 2003 Convention against Corruption, 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>15</sup> Legal provisions applicable to these elections are also included in the 2022 Law on Financing Political Activities (LFPA), the 2019 Law on Prevention of Corruption, the 2009 Law on Political Parties, the 2009 Law on Administrative Disputes, the 2016 Law on Administrative Procedures, and the 2005 Criminal Code.

challenges.<sup>16</sup> The LLE was last amended on 23 April 2024 to allow for the possibility of holding local elections on 2 June, simultaneously with the Belgrade City Assembly elections.<sup>17</sup>

The government-led inter-agency Working Group on Co-ordination and Follow-up of the Implementation of ODIHR Recommendations for the Improvement of the Electoral Process was temporarily resumed in March 2024 under the caretaking government, and prepared amendments to election-related laws with the aim to address several ODIHR recommendations.<sup>18</sup> While several ODIHR EOM interlocutors welcomed the proposed changes as a possible improvement, some underlined that these are mostly of a technical nature and proper implementation of the existing legislation is needed to address issues pertinent in the previous elections. Those amendments have not yet been tabled in parliament.

On 2 May, a new parliamentary Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process composed of representatives of the ruling and opposition parties and civil society was established. The Working Group is currently focusing on amendments to address all previous ODIHR recommendations, at the same time prioritizing recommendations for the current electoral process. To date, apart from the amendments to the LUVR adopted on 10 May, no other changes applicable to these elections were adopted.

## V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Local elections are managed by a two-tiered election administration, which for these elections comprises 90 Local Election Commissions (LECs), one in each territorial-administrative unit where elections will be held on 2 June, as well as some 4,450 Polling Boards (PBs), one for each polling station. The REC has limited competence for local elections.<sup>19</sup>

LECs are composed of a chairperson and regular members, as well as their respective substitutes, and operate in a standing and an extended composition.<sup>20</sup> The standing composition members are nominated by political groups proportionally to their representation in the respective local assemblies.<sup>21</sup> The extended composition comprises members appointed by the electoral contestants, who may nominate members as soon as the respective candidate list has been registered, but no later than 25 May. The law stipulates that equitable gender representation and inclusion of persons with disabilities should be observed when nominating LEC members, but there is no mechanism to enforce this legal provision.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, the LEMP stipulates an establishment of *ad hoc* Committee for Campaign Oversight within the National Assembly, while it is unclear if this also applies for local elections. The LLE is silent about the accreditation of observers while according to the LEMP, only the REC accrediting observers.

<sup>17</sup> These recent amendments extended the period for announcing elections and adjusted the interval between the announcement and the holding of the elections, stipulating that the decision to call local elections is made no earlier than 150 days (previously 120 days) and no later than 45 days before the end of the council's mandate, and that no less than 30 days (previously 45 days) and no more than 60 days can pass from the day local elections are called to the day of voting. The amendments also allow for simultaneous elections of city councillors and city municipality councillors to take place at the same polling stations.

<sup>18</sup> The proposed changes aimed to address only some recommendations in the ODIHR 2023 [Final Report](#) and were related to *inter alia*, candidate registration, campaign finance, defining criteria for national minority status, and shortening deadlines for Constitutional Court decisions. On 15 April, ODIHR issued an [urgent opinion](#) noting that while the proposed amendments represented a positive development in addressing some pending recommendations, they do not constitute a comprehensive legislative review repeatedly recommended by ODIHR.

<sup>19</sup> In practice, the REC has adapted training material to these local elections and is delivering training for polling board members across the country.

<sup>20</sup> LECs have broad competences in the organization of local elections which include publishing a calendar of electoral activities, managing technical election preparations, registering candidate lists, publishing voter registration data, appointing polling boards and designating polling stations, determining the ballot design and printing ballots, distributing and retrieving the election material, adjudicating complaints, deciding on requests for the annulment of voting at polling stations due to irregularities during voting, and establishing results.

<sup>21</sup> In its permanent composition, each LEC has 7 to 13 members, depending on the number of registered voters in the respective territorial-administrative unit.

The REC organizes training sessions for LEC members, focusing on the mandate of LECs as well as on dealing with complaints and requests for the annulment of results.

LEC sessions are public, and decisions must be published within 24 hours. The REC website is used for the centralized publication of all complaints filed with LECs and all decisions. So far, despite the condensed timeframe, LECs have met all legal deadlines, and election preparations are underway. Since the call for elections, the Belgrade City Election Commission (CEC) has been holding regular sessions streamed on YouTube, a transparency measure that was welcomed by several civil society organizations (CSOs). The Belgrade CEC has also released two voter information spots related to voter registration and identification and ballot marking, which are aired by national broadcasters.

LECs appoint PBs based on proposals by political groups represented in the respective local assemblies, no later than 22 May. PBs are composed of a chairperson and two regular members, and their respective substitutes, and may also be extended to include members and substitute members proposed by the electoral contestants. Contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation, training for PB is not mandatory; the law only stipulates that the chairpersons and their substitutes should have completed training and have experience from previous elections.<sup>22</sup>

LECs designate polling stations on the proposal of local administrations, within ten days of the announcement of the elections. Premises for polling stations must be independently accessible for voters with disabilities. According to the LEMP, the upper limit for voters per polling station is 2,500. To prevent overcrowding and as a reaction to a previous ODIHR recommendation, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (MPALSG) advised local authorities to limit the number of voters per polling station to 1,800.

## VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens who are at least 18 years old on election day have the right to vote, except those fully deprived of legal capacity by a court decision. The disenfranchisement of voters based on intellectual and psychosocial disabilities is at odds with international standards.<sup>23</sup>

Voter registration is passive. The MPALSG is responsible for maintaining the UVR, a permanent electronic database based on the civil register. Since April 2024, the MPALSG publishes the number of voters per territorial-administrative unit on a monthly basis.<sup>24</sup> As of 23 April 2024, the UVR contained the records of 4,213,730 voters registered in those territorial-administrative units where local elections will be held on 2 June. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors stated that the published information is insufficient for a meaningful scrutiny of the UVR. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors voiced concerns about the accuracy of the UVR due to alleged misuse of the UVR in the past, mostly related to alleged large-scale organized voter migration in connection with the local elections.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In March 2024, the government-led Working Group for Co-operation with ODIHR proposed to amend the legal framework to oblige the REC to organize PB training for all type of elections; at the time of writing, the proposed amendment had not been put to a vote in parliament.

<sup>23</sup> Article 29 of the 2006 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) requires States Parties to “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. Paragraph 9.4 of the 2013 [CRPD Committee’s Communication No. 4/2011](#) states that “an exclusion of the right to vote on the basis of a perceived or actual psychosocial or intellectual disability, including a restriction pursuant to an individualized assessment, constitutes discrimination on the basis of disability”.

<sup>24</sup> As provided for in the [Instruction for the Implementation of the Law on the Unified Voter Register](#) published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia on 19 April 2024. Previously, the data was published quarterly. According to Speaker of the Parliament this change was implemented as a direct result of the parliamentary dialogue on the improvement of election conditions and the implementation of ODIHR recommendations.

<sup>25</sup> In response to a request by the government-led Working Group from 19 March 2024, ODIHR prepared two comparative reviews, one of practices and regulations to access voter registration data, and one of methodological approaches for conducting voter registration data audits.



Voters can verify their registered data at local administration premises or online and request corrections at their local administration from the call for elections until 15 days prior to election day. Upon closure of the UVR, the MPALSG determines the total number of voters per territorial-administrative unit and polling station and forwards the excerpts to the respective LEC which then publishes them in the official gazette. From the closure of the UVR, voters and electoral contestants may request changes directly at the MPALSG. Final voter lists for each polling station are published by LECs, based on an extract from the UVR produced 72 hours before election day.

On 10 May, the LUVR was amended with the aim to enhance confidence in the accuracy of the voter lists and address the alleged organized voter migration related to the December 2023 Belgrade City Assembly elections. Following these amendments, voters will be included in the voter list according to their place of residence as of 3 July 2023. While some ODIHR EOM interlocutors welcomed this as a measure to restore a certain degree of trust in the UVR, others voiced concerns about possible disenfranchisement of some 15,000 Belgrade residents.

## **VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION**

Citizens eligible to vote have the right to stand for councillor in the territorial-administrative unit where they are registered to vote. Political parties and coalitions, or groups of citizens can submit candidate lists to LECs. The lists must comply with the 40 per cent gender quota to be registered, requiring that at least two out of every five candidates must be from the less represented gender.

Requests to register candidate lists have to be supported by signatures from eligible voters, certified by public notaries, municipal authorities, or courts.<sup>26</sup> The signature collection and candidate registration period started with the call of the elections and ended on 12 May. Any omissions in the submitted documents which do not constitute grounds for rejection may be rectified within 48 hours. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns about the potential use of fraudulent signatures certified by municipal authorities as well as difficult access to certifying authorities for some opposition lists. Voter may sign in support of only one candidate list.

LECs are mandated with candidate registration. Upon completion of the registration period, LECs publish the “collective” list of candidates no later than 17 May. After the proclamation of the “collective” list, contestants may no longer withdraw their candidate lists nor individual candidates their candidacies.

On 14 May, the opposition claimed that several of its candidate list in Belgrade were rejected on the grounds that some candidates did not have residence in the respective municipality on 3 July 2023 and therefore did not meet the residency requirement for voters introduced by the latest amendments to the LUVR. Recent amendments to the LUVR stipulate that candidates for these elections are excluded from this requirement if the respective candidate list was submitted prior to 11 May, when amendments entered into force. Part of the opposition threatened to boycott and obstruct the elections unless the lists were registered by 17 May.

## **VIII. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT**

Contestants are allowed to campaign from the call of the elections, while the law prescribes an official campaign period with equal campaign conditions in the media from the publication of the final candidate lists on 17 May. Campaigning and the publication of opinion polls are prohibited 48 hours

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<sup>26</sup> The number of required signatures is determined by the number of registered voters in the respective territorial-administrative unit.

prior to election day and until closing of polling stations. Campaigning on social networks is not regulated.

By law, public officials may perform a function in a political party and participate in its activities, provided this does not affect their public function and is not prohibited by law. Public officials may not use public resources for the promotion of political parties and candidates, and may not promote a party during meetings in which they participate as public officials. Public officials, except for members of parliament and provincial and local assemblies, are required to inform the public, if they express the position of the public authority or the political party. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns about alleged increased use of budgetary resources by the interim authority of the Belgrade City Assembly.<sup>27</sup> On 9 May, opposition MPs initiated a petition to the Constitutional Court, claiming that the President violated the Constitution in connection with the use of his name on the SNS candidate lists.<sup>28</sup>

During candidate registration, the ODIHR EOM noted limited traditional in-person campaign activities. ODIHR EOM interlocutors attributed the slow start of the campaign to election fatigue and Easter holidays and that campaign activities will increase after the end of the candidate registration period. Long-standing concerns related to possible vote-buying and pressure on public employees remain.

Contestants and political actors boycotting the elections are active on social networks, including Facebook, X and Instagram, through videos and posts.<sup>29</sup> The political discourse, both online and offline, has been dominated so far by national issues, including the status of Kosovo,<sup>30</sup> the UN draft Resolution on Srebrenica, and the country's effort in dealing with geopolitical dynamics in the region and beyond, while local infrastructure issues also feature.<sup>31</sup> In Belgrade, political actors extensively discussed local infrastructure projects, including public tenders ahead of the EXPO 2027.

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign financing is primarily regulated by the 2022 Law on Financing Political Activities (LFPA) and the 2019 Law on Prevention of Corruption (last amended in 2022). The LFPA has not changed since its adoption. Previous long-standing recommendations of the ODIHR and the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) primarily include recommendations related to the absence of a campaign expenditure limit, rules on campaigning by third parties, an absence of an effective oversight mechanism, lack of a system of dissuasive sanctions, and lack of effective disbursement of public funds.

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<sup>27</sup> Since 22 April, the Belgrade City administration placed billboards advertising payments of RSD 20,000 (around EUR 171) for each child in grammar school or high school and free access to municipal swimming pools. Other municipalities placed posters advertising free English-language and computer classes for the elderly and youth.

<sup>28</sup> A total of 84 MPs must sign the petition initiating the procedure for dismissal of the President. Article 118 of the Constitution states: "The President of the Republic shall be dismissed for the violation of the Constitution, upon the decision of the National Assembly, by the votes of at least two thirds of deputies. The Constitutional Court shall have the obligation to decide on the violation of the Constitution, upon the initiated procedure for dismissal, not later than within 45 days".

<sup>29</sup> The ODIHR EOM is following the social media accounts of major contestants and the leaders of major parties, as well as the official accounts of selected municipalities. In addition, the ODIHR EOM is conducting a qualitative analysis of hate speech, inflammatory language or derogatory comments, or presence of disinformation narratives in social networks.

<sup>30</sup> All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

<sup>31</sup> In May, the UN General Assembly will vote on a Resolution on establishing an International Day of Remembrance for the Genocide in Srebrenica. On 16 April 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [voted in favour of Kosovo's membership](#), while the final decision on membership is to be made by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers.



Political parties represented in parliament or in local self-government units are entitled to annual public funding in proportion to their results in the previous elections. Submitters of electoral lists also benefit from public funding for campaigning, amounting to 0.07 per cent of tax revenues of the annual budget of respective local self-government. Public campaign funding is disbursed in two installments. The first installment, divided equally among all registered lists, is paid within five days of the publication of the ‘collective list of candidates,’ which is due 15 days before election day. The amount of the second installment depends on the number of mandates won by the political party. Contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation, it is not contingent on verifying lawful campaign financing. To receive public funding, contestants must deposit an electoral bond equal to the amount of the first installment.

Contestants may finance their campaign activities from monetary and in-kind donations, membership fees, their own funds, credits and loans; donations from various sources, including foreign and state-funded sources, are prohibited.<sup>32</sup> Donations exceeding one average monthly salary must be disclosed on the website of the list submitter, within eight days of receipt.<sup>33</sup>

The Agency for Prevention of Corruption (APC) is mandated with overseeing political finance and preventing the misuse of state resources. List submitters must provide interim campaign-finance reports to the APC, no later than seven days before election day, covering the period from calling of the elections until 15 days prior to election day and therefore excluding the final phase of the campaign. Final campaign-finance reports must be submitted within 30 days of the publication of election results.<sup>34</sup> However, the APC is required to publish its conclusions on interim and final reports within 120 days from the deadline for submitting them. The APC has deployed 44 field monitors to collect field data on campaign expenditures. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors have voiced a lack of trust in the APC, due to lack of proactive approach to address alleged violations.<sup>35</sup>

## X. MEDIA

The media includes numerous outlets, despite a relatively small advertising market, but it grapples with financial vulnerability and political polarization.<sup>36</sup> Challenges to the media environment include intimidation of journalists, impunity for crimes against journalists, political and economic influence over media outlets, media ownership concentration, and inconsistent enforcement of legislation.<sup>37</sup>

Public-service media are funded by license fees. *Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS)* runs three TV channels and four radio stations with nation-wide coverage, while the regional *Radio-Television of*

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<sup>32</sup> Public funds for regular political activities may be used to finance election campaigns. Donations from anonymous sources, non-profit organizations, trade unions and religious organizations, the gaming community, or through third parties, are also prohibited. Legal or natural persons with public procurement contracts may not donate during the validity of the contract and for a period or two years after the contract’s termination.

<sup>33</sup> An individual may donate up to 10 average monthly salaries per year (in February 2024, the average monthly salary was RSD 94,125 or around EUR 800), while a legal person may donate up to 30 monthly salaries annually. In election years, these limits are doubled, regardless of the number of contests.

<sup>34</sup> The interim and final reports must be published on the APC website within three and seven days, respectively.

<sup>35</sup> In its periodic review, the UN Human Rights Committee recommended strengthening the mandate and independence of the APC. On 18 March 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee, in its concluding observations on the [fourth periodic review](#), expressed regrets about the lack of information provided by Serbia on mechanisms guaranteeing the independence of the agency and about the lack of information provided on cases involving corruption by high-public officials.

<sup>36</sup> According to [Freedom House’s Nations in Transit](#), the rating of independent media has decreased from 4.00 in 2014 to 2.75 in 2024. In the Reporters Without Borders’s 2024 [World Press Freedom Index](#), out of 180 countries Serbia is now ranked 98, compared to 54 in 2014.

<sup>37</sup> The Council of Europe [Safety of Journalists Platform](#) recorded five active alerts in 2024, related to attacks on the physical safety and integrity of journalists (2), harassment and intimidation of journalists (2), and impunity (1). While the 2023 Annual Report on the Activities of the Permanent Working Group for Safety of Journalists, [indicates](#) slightly improved statistics regarding the number of assaults and processed cases, the Independent Association of Journalists (NUNS) has already recorded 50 new attacks against journalists in 2024.

*Vojvodina (RTV)* has two TV channels and three radio stations. The members of public-service media managing boards are appointed by the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM) for a five-year term. In 2022, the REM renewed the terrestrial licenses for commercial televisions *TV Pink*, *TV Happy*, *TV Prva* and *TV B92*, while the allocation of a fifth license is still pending.<sup>38</sup>

The Constitution and media laws provide a framework to safeguard freedom of expression and the media, including diversity, promotion of media pluralism, and prohibition of censorship and incitement to hatred and discrimination. Amendments to media laws adopted in October 2023 aimed at aligning media legislation with EU directives. Despite some positive steps, certain legislative changes – such as the failure to mandate a new election of REM Council members despite a revised appointment mechanism, the absence of provisions enforcing ethical standards for media receiving public funding, and provisions allowing state co-ownership of private media – have raised concerns among local and international media watchdogs and ODIHR EOM interlocutors.<sup>39</sup>

Under the Law on Electronic Media, audio-visual service providers must adhere to regulations such as banning political advertising outside election periods, publishing political advertising tariffs before the campaign, providing non-discriminatory election coverage, clearly labelling election programmes, and disclosing detailed opinion poll methodologies. During 30 days before election day, media may not report on the inauguration of public infrastructure projects if public officials who are also candidates participate in such events. Election laws mandate fair representation of contestants and a 48-hour election silence period. Public-service media must offer contestants free and equal airtime.

The REM is tasked with monitoring compliance of the audio-visual service providers with the legislation. On 5 April, the REM initiated a public hearing to review 15 regulations, among them the Rulebook for election coverage by media service providers. This rulebook was approved on 7 May, without substantial changes compared to the previous version, and will enter into force 8 days after its publication on 10 May. It applies to all broadcasters, not just public-service media as in previous elections. As part of its supervisory plan, the REM will address any complaints received and has initiated its monitoring of eight broadcasters.<sup>40</sup> The final report on the monitoring of the December 2023 elections has yet to be published and media-related complaints submitted to the REM have not resulted in any sanctions to date.<sup>41</sup>

On 6 May, the ODIHR EOM commenced its quantitative and qualitative media monitoring of the political and election-related coverage of eight TV stations.<sup>42</sup>

## XI. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

The Constitution recognizes 23 national minorities and foresees temporary special measures to ensure their political participation and representation. Of the 120 registered political parties, 71 represent national minorities. In the current parliament, 12 MPs were elected from national minority lists, and some other MPs who are members of national minorities were elected with mainstream parties. Three

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<sup>38</sup> The European Commission in its [Serbia 2023 Report](#) noted that the fifth license “has still not been awarded, without credible justification”. Regarding freedom of expression, the report stated that limited progress had been made during the reporting period.

<sup>39</sup> The EU [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR) expressed concern over a provision which would essentially facilitate the return to state co-ownership of private media in Serbia, diverging from the 2020 Media Strategy adopted by the Government of Serbia.

<sup>40</sup> The REM is conducting quantitative monitoring of four public television channels and four national private channels.

<sup>41</sup> The interim report on REM media monitoring published on 26 December 2023 did not include data about the four private nationwide terrestrial TV channels.

<sup>42</sup> The ODIHR EOM’s media monitoring sample includes six television channels with national terrestrial coverage (*RTSI*, *RTV1*, *TV Pink*, *TV Happy*, *TV Prva*, *TV B92*), monitored daily between 18:00 and 24:00 hrs., and the prime-time news programmes of two cable television channels (*NI* and *Nova S*).

members of the new government belong to national minorities.<sup>43</sup> Several mayors are members of minorities, nominated both by minority lists and by mainstream parties.<sup>44</sup>

Candidate lists representing national minorities need a lower number of supporting signatures to register and a lower number of votes to receive public funding. The law does not provide criteria for the election commissions to determine which candidate lists represent national minorities, which allows for potential abuse of the preferential terms for contesting elections.

The law prescribes that in municipalities where a national minority accounts for over 15 per cent of the local population, the ballots and election administration documents must also be produced in the language of the respective minority. Several national minority parties registered lists to contest the upcoming elections in municipalities with significant minority populations.

## XII. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Complaints against decisions, actions, or inactions of LECs and PBs are filed with the respective LEC, and LEC's decisions on these complaints may be appealed to the Higher Court.<sup>45</sup> The law provides for broad legal standing to list submitters but possibility to file complaints by other interested parties is narrower and depends on the subject matter.<sup>46</sup> Citizen observers can only complain about their right to observe the printing and handover of ballots. The law prescribes timely electoral dispute resolution.<sup>47</sup> The Higher Courts do not hold public sessions when considering election related complaints.

The REC maintains a database of complaints filed with LECs and courts.<sup>48</sup> Since the elections were called and until 11 May, 95 complaints have been uploaded to the REC website, all related to the registration of candidate lists. Most complaints were submitted by voters. Of these, 78 complaints argued that the use of President Vučić's name on the SNS candidate lists is incompatible with his constitutional role and constitutes a conflict of interest; most of them were dismissed as falling outside the LECs' competences. Two decisions of LECs were further appealed to the Higher Courts.<sup>49</sup> The remaining complaints were related to alleged forgery of supporting signatures in registration documents, the status of minority list, a candidate list not meeting the required 40 per cent gender quota, or a LEC

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<sup>43</sup> The Ministers for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, for Tourism and Youth, and a minister without portfolio.

<sup>44</sup> Including the mayor of Novi Pazar (Social Democratic Party; SDP) and the presidents of the municipalities of Ada (SNS), Bačka Topola (Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians; SVM/VMSZ), Bosilegrad (Bulgarian party "That we are – Vladimir Zaharijev"), Bujanovac (Democratic Party; DP), Dimitrovgrad (SNS), Kanjiža (SVM/VMSZ), Kovačica (SNS), Preševo (Alternative for Change), Senta (SVM/VMSZ), Sjenica (SDP), Tutin ("Tutin in First Place"), and Žagubica (SNS).

<sup>45</sup> The 2022 amendments to the LLE transferred the responsibility of handling appeals related to local elections from the Administrative Court to the Higher Courts whose jurisdiction includes the respective local self-government unit. While LEC's decisions to reject or dismiss complaints may be appealed to the court by the complainant, possibility to appeal LEC's decisions granting complaints is limited to cases of direct violation of legal interest of the complainant.

<sup>46</sup> Voters can file complaints against decisions on candidate lists, the appointment of LEC members in the extended composition and PB members, and against decisions on the LEC general report on the election results. However, voters can only file complaints at the polling station in case of violation of their voting rights. The right to file complaints at the polling station on irregularities is only granted to list submitters. Political parties can file complaints against the decisions on the appointment of LEC members in the extended composition, while councillor's groups can file complaints against the appointment of PB members in the standing composition.

<sup>47</sup> The deadlines for filing and resolving complaints range between two and three days; appeals must be filed within three days, with the appeal body having three days to decide.

<sup>48</sup> Complaints may only be submitted in hard copy.

<sup>49</sup> In its decision, the Novi Sad Higher Court noted that the law does not prohibit using the name of the president in the list. The Higher Court in Kraljevo upheld a decision of the Raška LEC, which dismissed a case as untimely.

member being on a candidate list. Four of these complaints were rejected as unsubstantiated, while one was rejected on technical grounds as filed by an unauthorized person.<sup>50</sup> Four complaints were upheld.<sup>51</sup>

The APC receives complaints against misuse of public resources and offices by public officials and political entities in election campaigns and violations of campaign-finance regulations. The APC can also review such cases *ex officio*. In general, the APC has five days to decide on complaints.<sup>52</sup> The APC reviews such cases in closed sessions as it is not required by law to hold public sessions. If the APC identifies irregularities, it can issue warnings and has exclusive power to refer cases to the Misdemeanour Court. Decisions of the APC related to campaign finance violations under the LFPA may be appealed to the Administrative Court, however, the court has no expedited deadline to decide on such cases.<sup>53</sup> Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, decisions of the APC not to initiate proceedings against public officials under the Law on Prevention of Corruption cannot be appealed.

### XIII. ELECTION OBSERVATION

The LEMP provides for unhindered citizen and international observation of all stages of the electoral process. Civil society organizations registered with a statutory purpose related to elections may nominate observers until seven days before election day. Only one citizen observer from the same entity may be present at a given election commission or polling station at the same time. International observers must request accreditation at least ten days before election day.<sup>54</sup>

The Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) and the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) informed the ODIHR EOM that they plan to observe the Belgrade City Assembly elections; CeSID also plans to conduct a parallel vote tabulation.

The ODIHR EOM was informed by several interlocutors of climate of pressure and a diminishing space for civic activities.<sup>55</sup> Following reports by CRTA pointing towards organized voter migration related to the December 2023 Belgrade City Assembly elections, state authorities and pro-government media have been continuously accusing CRTA of destabilizing the country's constitutional order.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Regarding the alleged forgery of supporting signatures, the LEC Valjevo stated that it does not check the authenticity of signatures.

<sup>51</sup> The Ivanjica LEC upheld the complaint and revoked its decision on registering the candidate list “Aleksandar Vučić – Ivanjica Tomorrow” as it did not meet the required 40 per cent gender quota. The Svrlijig LEC revoked its decision on registering a national minority candidate list, noting that the aim of the submitter of the list was not to represent the interested of the Russian national minority.

<sup>52</sup> By law, the APC must notify the political entity against which proceedings are initiated within 24 hours of receiving a complaint. However, the APC has five days from the day that the political entity was notified to decide on the complaint. In addition, the APC may request information from state bodies, banks, legal and natural persons, who are required to forward requested information within three days, which may further prolong the process.

<sup>53</sup> In addition, according to the Law on Administrative Dispute, the parties in the proceedings have to prove that their legal interest was violated by the administrative act.

<sup>54</sup> The LLE does not regulate accreditation of observers but states in Article 8 that “[the] provisions of the Law governing the election of Members of Parliament shall accordingly apply to local elections in matters not specifically regulated by this Law” Under the LEMP, the REC is charged with accrediting observers.

<sup>55</sup> See the [Communication](#) sent to the Government of Serbia on 20 February 2024 by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. UN Special Rapporteurs have flagged their “profound concern regarding the widespread discrediting statements and smear campaigns against election observers raising concern about potential fraud in Serbia, including by the highest-ranking politicians of the country. The European Commission’s Serbia 2023 Report noted “verbal attacks and smear campaigns against CSOs”.

<sup>56</sup> See the MPALSG [statement](#) from 13 April 2024.

#### **XIV. ODIHR EOM ACTIVITIES**

The ODIHR EOM opened in Belgrade on 30 April. The Head of Mission has met with the Acting Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, the presidents and members of the Republic Election Commission and of the Belgrade City Election Commission, the APC, the REM, leaders of political parties, representatives of civil society, and members of the diplomatic community. The ODIHR EOM has established regular contacts with the election administration, governmental institutions involved in the electoral process, political parties, candidates, civil society, the media, and the diplomatic community.

*The English version of this report is the only official document.  
An unofficial translation is available in Serbian.*