



Belgrade Elections 2018 – Campaign **Before** the Campaign?



January 23rd 2018

As a domestic election observation mission, CARTA observes the entire electoral process within Belgrade elections, in accordance with [international election observation standards](#)¹, including the monitoring of the election campaign, the Election Day and period following the elections until the official announcement of the election results. CARTA monitored the entire electoral process around 2016 parliamentary elections, 2017 presidential elections, as well as 2017 local elections in Zajecar, thus contributing to the overall transparency of elections. Findings and recommendations of the CARTA's election observation correlate to the findings and recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR international election observation mission. CARTA is a member of the [European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations \(ENEMO\)](#) and of the [Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors \(GNDEM\)](#).

¹ Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, <https://www.ndi.org/dop>, <https://www.ndi.org/DoGP>

WHY MEDIA MONITORING?

According to the numerous findings of the public opinion polls, media is a dominant source of information about social and political issues for citizens of Serbia. Hereby, it is a dominant factor that influences voters' choice whether to participate in the electoral process, and, if yes, who to vote for. Unequal media representation of the political actors in the electoral process has already been noticed in the previous electoral cycles. Therewith, media environment is a very important indicator of the conditions for the electoral race that includes not only electoral contestants, but also the voters who receive contestant's political messages through the mainstream media.

Although Belgrade elections were called on January 15, 2018, which marked the official start of the campaign, Belgrade elections as a topic were frequently covered by media since fall.

For that reason, CRTA started its media monitoring before the official call for Belgrade elections and the official start of the electoral campaign in order to assess ways of informing citizens about the elections and what kind of messages they received both from the ruling parties and from the opposition.

Special focus in the analysis is given to violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, laws, bylaws and other normative acts, particularly including:

- Article 51 of the Constitution: *"Everyone shall have the right to be informed accurately, fully and timely about issues of public importance. The media shall have the obligation to respect this right."*
- Article 4 of the Law on Local Elections: *"Citizens are entitled, by the means of public information outlets, to be equally, timely, truthfully, impartially and completely informed about the election campaign of all submitters of electoral lists and candidates from such lists, as well as about other events of importance for the elections. Public information outlets shall in the election campaign ensure equality, timeliness, truthfulness, impartiality and completeness in providing information about all submitters of electoral lists and candidates from such lists, as well as about other events of importance for the elections. Election campaign, in the sense of this Law, shall entail all public political, promotional and other activities of submitters of electoral lists and candidates from such lists."*
- Article 47, paragraph 5 of the Law on Electronic Media: *"Every provider of media services is obliged to ... respect the ban on political advertising outside of the pre-election campaign, while during the pre-election campaign to ensure the representation of the registered political parties, coalitions and candidates without discrimination."*
- Article 22, paragraph 8 of the Law on Electronic Media which stipulates that Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) *"controls the activities of media service providers and takes care of consistent application of the provisions of the given Law"*.
- Article 5 of the Law on Public Information and Media: *"Everyone has a right to be informed accurately, fully and timely about issues of public importance. The media shall have the obligation to respect this right"*.
- Article 6 of the Law on Public Information and Media that protects media pluralism and stipulates that *"diversity of sources of information and media content should be secured in order to enable citizens to form informed opinion about happenings, events and personalities"*.
- Article 29 of the Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency: *"An official is required at all times to unequivocally present to his/her interlocutors and the general public whether he/she is presenting the viewpoints of the body in which he/she holds an office or viewpoints of a political party, i.e. political entity"*.
- Article 5 of the Regulation on Protection of Human Rights in Providing Media Services (REM) regarding the provision of accurate and complete information: *"The media service provider is obliged to ensure the truthfulness and completeness of the information, that is, the credibility and completeness of the ideas and opinions it publishes, especially in news and news programs"*.
- Article 7 of the Regulation on Protection of Human Rights in Providing Media Services (REM) regarding the provision of objective information: *"In informing the public, media service provider is obliged to provide objectivity of its information that is appropriate to the nature of the information, the area of social life to which it relates and the nature of the program content in which the information is published"*.
- Article 8 of the Regulation on Protection of Human Rights in Providing Media Services (REM) regarding the provision of two-source rule: *"If the program discloses information about which a particular person has a legitimate interest in pleading, and, in particular, if there are claims about incompetency, immorality or unlawful behavior, or there is a dispute involving a conflict"*.

MEDIA MONITORING METHODOLOGY

In the period October 2, 2017 to January 15, 2018 CRTA monitored the following media outlets: RTS (Daily News 2, Belgrade Chronicles, and Morning Program), TV PRVA (Daily News), TV N1 (Daily News and Morning Program), Studio B (News), TV Pink (National Daily News and Morning Program); web portals: blic.rs, kurir.rs and b92.net; as well as dailies Blic, Vecernje Novosti, Kurir, Informer and Politika.

Selection of media and programs that were included into the monitoring was based on findings of public opinion polls regarding citizens' most preferred sources of information on political, economic and social issues. Public opinion polls indicated traditional media (dominantly TV, and then print media, radio and online portals) as the main source of information, followed by one's micro-environment (family/friends/colleagues) and social networks and web portals.

During this period, a total number of 2.215 media articles/reports, which directly or indirectly related to the upcoming election of councilors for the Belgrade City Assembly, was analyzed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into the consideration the way media reported about Belgrade elections thus far, behavior of the political parties and representatives of the political parties, as well as the conduct of institutions authorized to monitor media performance, CRTA recommends:

- Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) to react to possible violations of the Law on Electronic Media and, in accordance with its obligations and authority, to secure equal representation of political parties in the electronic media;
- Anti-Corruption Agency to use legal powers *ex officio* in order to protect public interest, particularly in relation to the Article 29 of the Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency, which regulates the role of public officials in the election campaign;
- State and city officials, before or during media appearances, to clearly determine whether they act as public officials or as representatives of their political parties;
- Political actors to abstain from public officials campaigning (from misuse of state and city resources and functions to promote their own political party), as well as from negative campaigns;
- Media to clearly indicate whether they are talking to public officials in the capacity of their public functions, or to enquire about their activities within the election campaign;
- Media to exert all efforts to enable media pluralism and provide impartial information to citizens;
- All actors of the political arena to respect the provisions related to their performance, as well as the spirit of good practice that is a prerequisite for free and fair elections;
- In the long term, CRTA finds that there is a need to improve the legal framework regulating elections that would more clearly define the obligations of the media, as well as the behavior of state and other public officials both in the pre-election campaign and the overall election process.