

Belgrade, January 17th 2022

Peaceful referendum environment, without a meaningful and distinct referendum campaign

The referendum process took place in a peaceful environment, but there was no active campaign to help voters make an informed referendum decision. The campaign was noticeable only in the last seven to ten days of the campaign, mostly with the participation of the professional community. Due to the epidemiological situation, the campaign took place in the media and on social media, without public events. The referendum day was peaceful, and at the voting stations visited by CeSID (376) - *CeSID did not systematically and comprehensively observe the procedures on election day, but through mobile teams* - voting took place without major incidents, but poor organization of voting at polling stations was noticeable, which was also influenced by the fact that not all members of the voting boards were present at a significant number of polling stations. Problems with the organization of the voting stations, and availability but not regular use of epidemiological means were noticed, as well as various irregularities that were repeated at different polling stations - such as public and family voting and the use of mobile phones. Parallel voter records were observed at two polling stations, one inside the polling station and the other in front. The Republic Election Commission (REC) organized the referendum process in accordance with the positive legal framework and efficiently. The day before the voting, the REC had to make a decision on voting of citizens from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija in Vranje, Novi Pazar, Kursumlija and Raska, which introduced a completely different practice since the Pristina authorities banned the organization of voting in Kosovo and Metohija with the support of the OSCE (as practiced so far).

The referendum question was "*Are you in favor of confirming the Act amending the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*", which met the formal legal requirements, but it seems that the question remained incomplete and CeSID noted that the campaign left a lot of doubts on what citizens should vote about. The fact that the legislative framework was changed shortly before the vote and that the structure of the Republic Election Commission (REC) was changed as a result of inter-party dialogue, are contrary to international commitments and to good practice that major changes in the legal framework should not be introduced in the voting year. Although the referendum attracted public attention, only three legal entities were formally registered as organizers of the referendum campaign: "Ne davimo Beograd", the association "Suverenisti" and "Obraz", and they will be subjected to financial control according to the new regulations.

Excerpts from the voters' registry were again not available for the public scrutiny in accordance with the recommendations of international observers, although the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (as a body responsible for its management) have invested a lot of effort to improve its accuracy during 2019-2021. As in previous elections, notices of voting (although not a pre-condition for exercising the right to vote) were not duly submitted, which encouraged distrust in the accuracy of the voter list. The total number of voters for this referendum was 6,510,323.

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CeSID's observation mission will prepare a detailed and complete assessment of the quality of the entire referendum process after the completion of all election activities, i.e., after the analysis of the process of voting dispute resolution.