

Voting Matters: Head of OSCE Mission to BiH and Principal Deputy High Representative visit Brčko District



Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec, and the Principal Deputy High Representative and Brčko District Supervisor, Michael Scanlan, concluded today their visit to Brčko District (BD). The focus of the visit was to discuss with local officials the steps they are taking to ensure that the voters of the District can have high confidence in the 15 November election process in the District.

Ambassador Kavalec and Supervisor Scanlan welcomed the progress made by law enforcement authorities to address the allegations of electoral fraud in Brčko District. One of the avenues for such fraud is the inaccuracy of the voter registry. For this reason, the OSCE Mission supports the work by BD authorities to review the residence status of the District's inhabitants and to clean up the voter registry in the coming period. Ambassador Kavalec and Supervisor Scanlan met with the Public Registry Office to hear about progress made in this important effort. They underscored the importance of sending a clear message that only genuine residents of the District can vote, thus changing the negative practices of the past.

The OSCE Head of Mission and Brčko District Supervisor also met with representatives of 25 political parties, coalitions, and independent candidates to discuss the need for continued reforms that advance the interests of all citizens. The leaders of political parties signed an election pledge in which the political parties committed themselves to constructive conduct during the campaign. Ambassador Kavalec and Supervisor Scanlan noted that citizens want to see parties and politicians focus on offering concrete policy proposals that will improve their daily lives.

The OSCE Head of Mission and the Brčko Supervisor applauded the BD authorities' adoption of the Law on Peaceful Assembly and welcomed the commitment to adopt the Law on Associations and Foundations and the Law on the Rights of National Minorities before the election campaign starts. They also urged the authorities to advance their preparations of a new BD Law on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest so it would be ready to be adopted by the newly elected Assembly. They expressed the continued readiness of the OSCE Mission to BiH and the Office of the High Representative to support the process.

During the meetings with representatives of BD law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, Ambassador Kavalec and Supervisor Scanlan underlined specific roles that different institutions have in preventing and combating election fraud, and encouraged a proactive approach and closer co-operation between the Public Registry Department, the BD Police and the BD Prosecutor's Office. Another key issue that the Supervisor discussed in an earlier visit with the heads of Brčko's courts is the adequate sentencing in corruption and election fraud cases that is meant to serve as a deterrent to others who might be thinking of misusing public funds or exerting improper influence in the election process. In that context, judges from Brčko will participate in a seminar on sentencing hosted by the Embassy of the United States.

It was also noted that the District will be unique in BiH, as independent observers will be present at all polling stations, without exceptions, to help safeguard the integrity of the election process.

These measures and close co-operation between all relevant institutions should provide for a safe and fair environment for voters to cast their votes, restoring Brčko's capacity to serve as an example to others in BiH on how elections should be conducted.

Ambassador Kavalec and Supervisor Scanlan urged voters to choose their representatives based on long-term policies and concrete issues. They also commended the commitment of the Brčko District authorities to secure funding for personal protective equipment to be distributed to all polling stations in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19.