

Technology for Trust: Democracy starts at the ballot box, protecting every vote is protecting democracy



Op-Ed by the Acting High Representative Louis J. Crishock

Free and fair elections are the foundation of every democracy. Citizens are owed elections that respect their political will and protect every vote. The simple principle that every vote must be counted as cast should not be viewed merely as an electoral aspiration. It is a fundamental democratic norm.

New technologies and safeguards have been introduced into the electoral process to strengthen public trust, increase transparency, enhance the security of the vote, and reinforce accountability.

For too long, concerns about election fraud, manipulation, and irregularities have undermined citizens' confidence in the electoral system, depressing interest and turnout. When people lose faith that their vote will be secure and counted accurately, democracy itself is weakened. Measures designed to prevent fraud – including the responsible introduction of new election integrity technologies – are therefore not a luxury that can be postponed for some ideal time in the distant future, but an immediate democratic necessity.

Some politicians may assert that these new technologies are

designed to determine political outcomes – to pick winners and losers – but they are not. They are designed to protect the integrity of the electoral process, so that you the citizens/voters of Bosnia and Herzegovina freely determine electoral outcomes.

Greater use of technology will increase transparency at polling stations, and strengthen the authority and accountability of election institutions, all to provide you, the citizens, with greater confidence that the ballot you will cast is ultimately the ballot that is counted.

Political parties that vie to lead this country, and that genuinely respect democracy, should take no issue with measures designed to protect the integrity of elections.

I call on all parties, their leaders and activists to focus on the concerns that matter most to citizens: fighting crime and corruption, addressing nepotism, reducing unemployment, tackling rising prices, and improving living standards. Electoral campaigns should present credible solutions to these challenges and not raise political tensions through divisive, chauvinist narratives, or unfounded alarmist rhetoric about election technologies or the electoral process.

Responsibility for implementing election-integrity measures rests with the competent authorities. The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina has an important role in ensuring that these measures are implemented professionally, transparently and consistently. Technology, however, is not a substitute for strong institutions. It is a tool that can help institutions fulfil their responsibility to citizens.

Free and fair elections, a democratic norm, also represent a core requirement on Bosnia and Herzegovina's European path. A functioning democracy requires institutions that citizens can trust, rules that apply equally to all, and electoral procedures that protect the integrity of every vote.

Ultimately, this is not about technology per se. It is about trust.

It is my hope that these new technologies give you, the voters of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a reason to trust that when you enter a polling station, cast a ballot and depart that your vote will be respected, and not lost, altered manipulated or misused. This inviolability of the voting process undergirds democracy and accountability and forms the foundation of a prosperous democratic society.

Dear citizens, as the general election campaign season begins, I would urge you all to take an active role in the process. Acquaint yourselves with the new electoral procedures being implemented. Study the platforms and programs that political parties and candidates for office have proposed. Finally, make your choice and cast a vote for the parties and candidates you prefer.

The introduction of election integrity technology will make these elections the freest and fairest Bosnia and Herzegovina has ever seen. That said, technologies and processes are the strongest and most democratic when they include the active participation of the widest possible cross-section of an informed citizenry, so I encourage each and every citizen to consider the issues, make an informed choice and vote with confidence!