PEC Decides April 2000 Elections to be Held under Open List System

The Provisional Election Commission (PEC) decided in its session today to adopt the open list voting system for the municipal elections scheduled to be held on April 8, 2000. With this decision, the PEC took another step toward adapting the PEC Rules and Regulations to the draft of the Permanent Election Law.

This new provision mandates that ballots will have to contain not just the names of political parties but also the names of individual candidates. Voters may then select the individual candidates they favor, as well as the political parties. In addition, two or more independent candidates will be able to unite and submit a list of independent candidates. Therefore, community-inspired groups of citizens who do not want to affiliate with a political party or register as a political party will have access to the ballot.

This system will enhance accountability in government, as candidates will be directly selected by voters rather than simply relying on placement on the candidates' list by the parties. From our own polling and that of non-governmental organizations, this reform is widely supported by voters in BiH.

A consequence of the open list system is that in order to have manageable ballots, the numbers of deputies in municipal assemblies must be limited. Thus the Permanent Election Law sets a maximum of 31

members in assemblies/councils of the largest municipalities and fewer members for smaller assemblies/councils in municipalities with less population. The Provisional Election Commission decided to introduce this limitation for the 2000 elections as well. As a consequence, the Commission will be asking municipalities in both the Federation and Republika Srpska to meet the new requirements by the end of September so that appropriate ballots can be prepared in time for the April elections.

“Bringing the Rules and Regulations into harmony with the draft Election Law in time for the April elections will provide local authorities time to become accustomed to the new system and its administration, ” stated PEC Chairman and OSCE Head of Mission, Robert Barry. Acting High Representative Ralph Johnson added that the
reform will add a new element of transparency and democracy into the electoral system.