

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Preliminary Report 2026



Silba

Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy

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Summary

- **Overall, voting proceeded in an orderly, peaceful manner.**
- **The newly introduced technology generally worked well.** Only minor technical issues were detected which were mainly resolved swiftly by PSC members.
- **Polling staff seemed fairly well trained,** especially taking in to account 1) circumstances of the large last minute turnover of PCM staff including presidents, 2) last minute delivery of election technology,
- **The new candidate booklet created consistent challenges.** PCMs applied the procedure for the new candidate booklet inconsistently, which in some cases created a risk of voters influencing one another.
- **The secrecy of the vote was a recurrent concern,** stemming from insufficient procedural explanations to voters about ballot secrecy, inadequate ballot booth arrangements, and insufficient spacing within polling stations.
- **Seals attached to newly introduced technology were the subject of continuous procedural issues and inconsistency** throughout the opening, voting, and closing processes.
- **Accessibility remains a widespread issue,** despite prior recommendations.

Introduction

We are pleased to present this preliminary election observation report, which provides findings and observations from Silba's short-term monitoring of the general elections 2026 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This report does not evaluate the outcome of the elections. Instead, it focuses on observations related to election-day procedures and compliance with the Electoral Code as well as the rulebook of code of conduct of the 2026 General Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Electoral Context

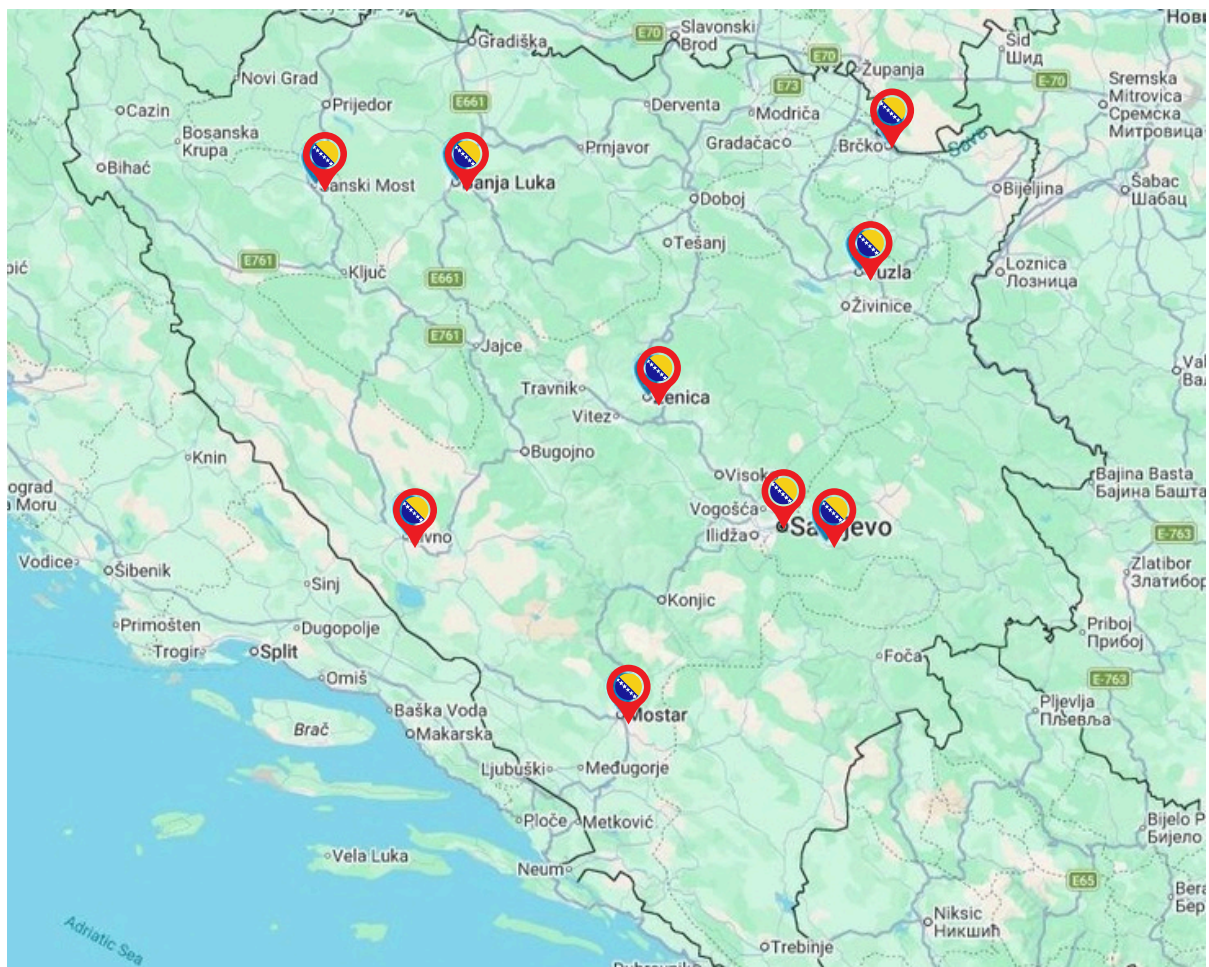
BiH held general elections on 4 October within a complex multi-level political system established under the Dayton Peace Agreement. The country comprises two entities - the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska - as well as Brčko District, which has a special administrative status. Elections concern institutions at state, entity and, within the Federation, cantonal level, with the ballots received depending on voters' registration and address. The elections took place amid continuing political divisions over the functioning of state institutions and relations between the entities. Ethnic representation remains central to the institutional framework and much of political competition. This context underlines the importance of impartial election administration, consistent implementation of procedures and public confidence in the electoral process. Earlier last month the [OSCE](#) expressed concern about divisive rhetoric and its potential to undermine trust and stability ahead of the election.

As a new development, the 2026 general elections introduced biometric voter identification and authentication, ballot scanners and electronic transmission of results. These changes made staff preparedness, clear voter information and consistent implementation particularly relevant to election-day observation. For Silba's short-term mission, key areas of attention included the operation of the new equipment, protection of voting secrecy, accessibility and observers' ability to follow procedures.

Also, it is important to note, that just up until the election, a significant number of the ICT devices for electronic implementations had still not been delivered to the CEC by the private supplier Smartmatic. Although the CEC made considerable efforts to ensure the proper introduction of ICT, the significantly shortened timeframe affected voter education, as well as the training and preparedness of the election administration to use ICT devices.

Deployment

We have deployed 40 short-term international observers from 12 different countries. The teams were strategically deployed across various areas in BiH covering both entities Republica Srpska, the Bosnian federation and the self-governing district Brčko. The specific observation points included: Sarajevo, Pale, Sanski Most, Mostar, Zenica, Brčko, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Livno. This targeted approach allowed us to maximize our coverage and ensure a diverse assessment of electoral conditions in different areas within BiH. Each of the cities holds particular significance in the political, cultural, and ethnic landscape of the country and thus helps us understand the electoral dynamics within the different areas, but also contribute to a more holistic picture of the elections in general.



Methodology

Silba's observers were deployed as short-term observers during election day. All observers were trained in the principles of non-partisanship and non-interference for the conduct of their observations. Our observers underwent extensive training, including completing the OSCE/ODIHR election observer course for short-term monitoring, as well as a training seminar in accordance with the BiH electoral code and the 2026 rulebook for the conduct of the general election (CoC), before election day.

They also received a briefing from the Central Election Commission and the Election Commissioner, Dr Irena Hadžiabdić, prior to the election. These briefings aimed to help the observers understand the election system, its procedures and the new technologies. Election observation was conducted using the Votemonitor app, which utilises standardised data collection forms based on the BiH electoral code and CoC.

Election Day Observations

Opening procedures

Silba observed opening procedures at 17 polling stations, all classified by observers as urban. Fourteen stations opened after the scheduled time of 07:00, with recorded delays ranging from three to twenty minutes. Observers attributed delays to unfinished preparations, including ballot counting, equipment setup, access to buildings and difficulties sealing the ballot box.

Most reports indicated that necessary materials were present and ballot packages were intact. However, observers recorded concerns about the sealing of the ballot box and the documentation of seal numbers. Several reports described technical problems involving biometric authentication devices and ballot scanners, most of them resolved within a reasonable amount of time by polling station staff, some with the help of technicians.

Election Day Observations

Voting

Silba had 164 observations throughout the voting day. Our observations assessed voting procedures as largely being followed at the polling stations visited, however, the redesigned ballot and reusable candidate lists presented recurring procedural challenges. In 46 instances, the candidate list was not checked for markings left before being given to the next voter, which could potentially influence the next voter's choice.

Concerns regarding secrecy of the vote

There were a number of ways in which secrecy surrounding the vote was compromised. Two of the commonly observed concerns are linked to the new scanner technology set-up and ballot redesign. Voters were not adequately informed on how to protect the secrecy of the vote, leading to instances where the new protective folder was not utilised, and instances where the voter incorrectly turned their ballots facing upwards while scanning, revealing their vote to the PCM in charge of scanning. Furthermore, a continuous concern which was already pointed out by [Silba's 2022 report](#) relates to the polling station layout. The positioning and set-up of the voter booths, which are arranged so that voters have their backs to the room, led to severe compromising of voter secrecy. In some instances this was further aggravated by polling stations being in a small/crammed room.

Accessibility was a recurring concern across the country

Observers assessed polling stations as inaccessible in 87 of 164 voting observations. Comments repeatedly describe stairs, upper-floor rooms without an apparent accessible alternative and narrow access routes. This issue was already known and acknowledged by CEC election officials prior to the elections, however the CEC was powerless to change anything in this regard. This should potentially be offset with the possibility to vote outside the polling station for physically impaired voters; however, observers only witnessed this in two instances. In both observations, it was noted that the possibility to vote was provided but not all procedures relating to outside voting were followed.

Election Day Observations

Issues with seals both on the biometrics and on ballot scanner

As part of the new voting technology, both biometric and ballot scanners with their accompanying ballot boxes should be protected by seals to prevent tampering. Across several polling stations our observers experienced inconsistency in how and how many seals were used, ranging from instances of improper sealing to missing seals and misplaced or incompletely closed seals. This image may reflect a lack of clear and consistent instructions on how to properly secure the technology using the seals. The official CEC published videos demonstrated one approach, while the CEC training Silba attended provided different instructions.

Access to observation was generally possible, with important exceptions

Inconsistent interpretation of the rules on observer rights led to some teams being denied access to polling stations. During opening procedures, one team was denied access as the PSP argued that international observers were not allowed to observe until voting commenced. In one instance, an observer team was asked to leave by a representative of the Election Commission of the basic constituency, arguing that observers are required to be accompanied by an interpreter.

On two succeeding occasions, the interpreter of one observer team was denied access with the argument that accreditation was a requirement.

In several instances, polling station staff were unsure of the correct procedure for receiving observers. This included failing to record observers accreditation information or not checking their ID before allowing them to oversee the voting process.

Election Day Observations

Closing procedures

17 polling stations were observed during the closing and counting procedure. Closing was late or delayed in 3 polling stations due to a mix of delayed opening time and issues with technology throughout the day. Extended opening time ranged from 15 to 30 minutes.

Counting procedures were largely followed, with only minor discrepancies observed. In five instances, local party observers participated in the counting process, contrary to CEC regulations and election observation standards. In a small number of cases, the prescribed procedures for handling invalid and spoiled ballots were also not followed correctly.

The separation of ballots for different levels of elections was generally upheld. However, the prescribed use of transparent bags for this purpose was observed in only five instances.

Irregularities with seal handling during closing

At 10 polling stations, observers noted irregularities in the handling of seals. These ranged from seal numbers not being checked before the ballot box was opened, to seals not being inspected to confirm they were intact. In several of these instances, the final seal number was not cross-checked against the seal number recorded in the protocols during opening.

General Remarks

Overall assessment

In general, the elections went smoothly and only in a few instances did we observe longer lasting technological issues. The voting procedure was also largely followed. However, the secrecy of the vote was continuously called into question and the redesign of the ballot led to procedural inconsistency. Issues with seals were a recurring event during both opening, throughout voting and counting.

Preliminary recommendations

Lastly, Silba would like to present our preliminary recommendations. We encourage all relevant stakeholders to consider them, in the hope that they will be a helpful contribution to future elections.

- **Improving accessibility:** It is necessary to improve the physical accessibility of polling stations for voters with disabilities. It is recommended to install ramps and have polling stations on ground level if an elevator is not available.
- **Measures should be taken to protect the secrecy of the vote:** In this regard, it is recommended to change the voter booth layout and introduce a clearly defined minimum “secrecy distance” around each booth to better safeguard the secrecy of the vote.
- **A clearer sealing procedure is required in general:** It is recommended that the sealing procedure be clarified in the CEC rulebook, i.e. the correct number of seals and where they should be put.
- **Observers' rights should be clarified:** An observer team should be permitted to follow the OSCE standard of two observers and one interpreter. It is recommended that this combination should be explicitly permitted at the polling station. It is also recommended that polling stations procedure instruction on this matter is clarified to avoid confusion and the risk of observers being dismissed at PS.

A final report will be published on Silba's website within a month.

Acknowledgements

Silba would like to thank the CEC for facilitating the accreditation process and organising the briefing, which provided an introduction to the new technologies and procedures. We also extend our appreciation to the journalists, local stakeholders, fellow international observers, and all other interlocutors who contributed to the mission's observation. The mission also thanks the local interpreters for their cooperation and support. Special thanks are due to Commit Global for providing Vote Monitor, which enabled real-time data collection and reporting from polling stations. The findings and conclusions of Silba are fully independent.

General Remarks

Organisers

Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy is a Danish non-partisan and nonprofit youth organization which aims to strengthen democratic dialogue, institutions and organizations. Silba organizes local and international activities, with a main focus on election observation missions, long term international projects and local engagement.

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