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Executive Summary

Strategy and Action Plan to Improve the Integrity, Transparency and Efficiency in the BiH Electoral Process

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1 Introduction

The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the independent body that “coordinates, oversees and regulates the lawful operation of all election commissions and Polling Station Committees” and that “certifies that elections are conducted in accordance with the Law”¹.

For more than fifteen years now, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), with the support of the Local Electoral Commissions, have overseen and delivered all of the electoral events that have taken place in BiH at national, entity and local level.

Consistently through the years, Elections in BiH have probably been the most heavily scrutinised in the world. As an example, over 50,000 national and international observers were accredited to oversight the 2018 General Elections. It is a measure of the strength of BiH electoral system that the vast majority had confidence in the results.

The election observation works highlight areas for improvement. This is the case for the findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions to BiH and of the GRECO recommendations, which consistently highlight a series of shortcomings that need to be addressed to guarantee that the BiH electoral system meets European standards.

This is a nuclear issue as it has a direct link to **the first of the 14 key priorities** of the *European Commission’s Opinion² on the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) for EU membership*. This priority is aimed at ensuring that elections are conducted in line with European standards by implementing OSCE/ODIHR and relevant Venice Commission recommendations.

“European standards” refer to the principles of democratic elections in the broader context of respect for human rights. Those principles, as adopted by the Council of Europe (Venice Commission) and the OSCE, are the principles of **Universality, Equality, Rule of Law, Freedom, Secrecy and Transparency**.

These European principles define minimum standards that individual countries fulfil by different means. This way, countries develop their own practise to fulfil the principles while accommodating their specific operational needs.

In this context, the EU has funded the project “*EU Support of a Strategy and Action Plan to Improve the Integrity, Transparency and Efficiency in the BiH Electoral Process (EC/BiH/TEN/19/008)*”. The project aims at supporting CEC in the elaboration of the **framework and roadmap** to strengthen CEC’s capacity to successfully deliver elections in a **transparent, efficient and sustainable manner while meeting European standards**.

The project focus is on the **organisational, technical, operational and public communication** aspects of election administration.

This Executive Summary presents three of the outcomes of the EU funded project, which are:

- The **five-year Strategy** to improve integrity, transparency and efficiency in BiH’s electoral process
- The accompanying **Action Plan**
- The **Communication Strategy** to increase transparency and public trust in the electoral organisation and citizens overall trust in the election process.

This Executive Summary is submitted accompanied by three documents: **Part 1- Strategy Outline, Part 2- Action Plan** and **Communication Strategy for the Central Electoral Commission of BiH**.

¹ Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina

² Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina’s application for membership of the European Union. COM(2019) 261 final. 29.05.2019



2 Five-year Strategy

At the start of the project, back in Sep 2019, the project team carried out the analysis of the legal, procedural, technological and operational aspects of BiH's elections administration to outline the current state of play. The analysis report was a valuable tool to help contextualise the recommendations from OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions' reports.

The main conclusion of the assessment exercise was the realisation that the foundations of the BiH electoral administration are currently under strain and facing several challenges.

CEC mandate is to certify the overall “compliance” of election delivery and yet **the resources and tools to deliver on their mandate are scarce and technically outdated**. The assessment report highlighted the key challenges as:

- The necessary re-design of the electoral administration internal processes
- The need to implement information systems to support those processes
- The use of technology to provide a better service and guarantee the integrity of processes and data
- The design of a strategy to communicate better and engage voters

The Strategy has been designed around four priority areas (Strategic Lines) each one having a number of medium-long term Action Lines (39 in total) to deliver their objectives:

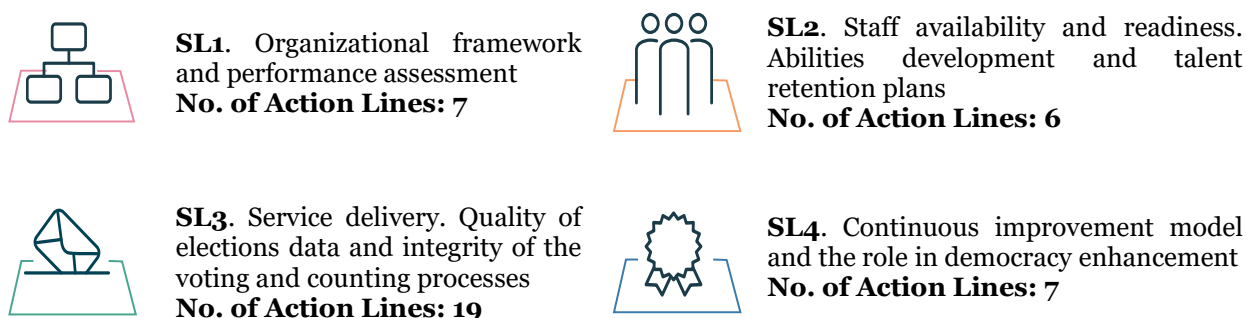


Figure 1 -The four Strategic Lines

The Action Lines in each of the above Strategic Lines are categorised according to their scope of application:

- **Operations Transformation:** Some Action Lines will deliver changes in the way processes, activities and procedures are performed
- **ICT (technology):** Some Action Lines will leverage on digitalization and technology for process improvement
- **Change Management:** Some Action Lines will develop initiatives to engage the organisation in adopting the change

From a technology perspective, the Strategy recommends the implementation of **nineteen technology solutions** classified as:

- Support to corporate functions
- Elections administration tools
- Technology to support Election Day processes
- Post-elections tools

Full details on the proposed Strategy, Action Lines and recommended Technology Solutions can be found in the attached document ““*Strategy and Action Plan to Improve the Integrity, Transparency and Efficiency in the BiH Electoral Process. Part 1 - Strategy Outline*” including:



- The methodology used to design the Strategy
- The Strategic Lines in which the strategy is articulated
- The Action Lines to deliver each Strategic Line
- The Inventory of ICT solutions in the Strategy and the detailed business requirements of each of the solutions
- The recommended technology approach to deliver the Strategy both, in terms of IT infrastructure and in terms of technology to modernise the management of the polling station
- The security aspects of elections administration from a strategic point of view
- The proposal on a project-based approach to deliver the Strategy

The following sections provide a summary of the scope of each Strategic Line.

2.1.1 Strategic Line 1 - Organisational Framework and Performance Assessment

Elections in BiH follow a distributed organisational approach (CEC, MECs and PSCs). In this context, this Strategic Line keeps focus on the refinement of the current governance model by detailing authority and responsibilities over legal compliance, risks, operations and audit matters in the elections administration organisation. The model will address how CEC would oversee responsibilities and risks across the extended elections organisation. Specific technology tools will be implemented to support CEC in performing these tasks.

Additionally, this Strategic Line will look into the current role-based operational model and reporting structure, in order to progress it towards a process-based operational model. The starting point for designing this transformation will be the definition of the CEC operational processes map. The processes map will be at the core of the rest of components in the Strategy and Action Plan.

Project Management basic methodology and tools will support the new operational model. The project management methodology will have a special focus on the implementation of Risks Management, fraud prevention and Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery plans.

Finally, this Strategic Line will detail responsibilities and performance standards for key roles in the organisation.

2.1.2 Strategic Line 2 - Staffing Availability and Readiness. Abilities Development and Talent Retention Plans

Two main issues summarise the staffing problems in the BiH elections organisations:

1. There is a structural lack of specialised staff (in areas such as project management or ICT for instance) in the CEC and MECs organisations
2. The point of contact for voters in the polling place are temporary employees (polling station members) that have received only a few hours of training and may not be sufficiently qualified to deliver a quality service

This Strategic Line focusses on implementing the methodology and tools for human resource planning in order to guarantee availability of qualified staff for both, permanent and temporary posts. The methodology and tools will guarantee knowledge transfer mechanisms for key roles.

The work will start with the inventory of current human resources (profile, qualifications and capacity) to estimate profile gaps and develop plans for capacity building and talent retention. Additionally, this Strategic Line will implement the information systems to support HR management.

The training program will be revisited to align it with the Strategic plan and to incorporate a continuous training approach for the permanent staff members and a reinforced training plan for temporary staff and for candidates, observers and the media. The training programme will be supported by e-learning technologies.

Finally, this Strategic Line will implement the processes and tools to monitor, control and provide feedback on staff performance and on the quality of the delivery of the training programme.



2.1.3 Strategic Line 3 - Service Delivery. Quality of Elections Data and Integrity of the Voting and Counting Processes

There is a fundamental link between quality of data and quality of service delivery in elections. For example, improving the accuracy of voters register data can expand accessibility of the vote, reduce administrative costs, prevent fraud and irregularities, and reduce polling place congestion leading to long lines.

This Strategic Line focuses on the improvement of the quality of elections delivery by guaranteeing elections data accuracy and integrity. Technology is a fundamental component for the development of this line of work, with a special focus on information systems to facilitate the work of CEC and MECs and on the modernisation of the management of polling stations through the introduction of technology.

As a summary, Strategic Line 3 focuses on the areas of:

- Modernisation of the technology platform for the production of the central voters register
- Implementation of tools to facilitate the selection of polling centres/polling stations, allocation of voters and production of voter's lists
- Implementation of tools to streamline the process of candidate nominations and ballot paper production
- Implementation of technology solutions to improve polling efficiency and auditability at both, in-country polling stations and for the process of out-of-country voting
- Technology solutions to streamline results transmission, consolidation and reporting at all levels: PSC, MEC and CEC
- Implementation of tools to support the complains and appeals workflow

The use of secure technology at polling stations would reduce administrative burden and enhance the verification and audit capacity of the electoral organisation, hence contributing to the transparency of the entire election process. There are three main processes at polling stations that can be supported by technology:

1. Technology to check voter's eligibility to vote
2. Technology to facilitate the vote and the count of the votes
3. Technology for the count results to be available centrally and verified for accuracy

The Strategy is based on **Electronic Pollbooks** to fulfil **processes 1 and 3**, and **Voting** (Ballot Generator) or **Counting machines** (Scanning Machine) to fulfil **process 2**.

1. Electronic Pollbooks (EPBs): Voter's eligibility check and transmission of results

Electronic Pollbooks are small computer equipment that help run the processes associated with voter identification at polling stations in an efficient way. They function as a digital voter's list and are used to identify voters and check their eligibility status and voting options.

EPBs have transmission capabilities and are also commonly used to support a fast and reliable reporting of preliminary results from polling stations into the central consolidation servers. This is a way of generating greater levels of confidence in the electoral process amongst stakeholders.

As a third functionality, the EPBs provide the Electoral Body with visibility on how Election Day operations at polling stations are unfolding via reporting information from the EPBs into a central monitoring system. This reporting includes issues that may come up at polling stations during the poll (logistics issues, incidents...) and also interim turnout figures throughout Election Day.

EPBs are becoming a standard tool used by many Electoral Commissions internationally as a way to introduce efficiency and guarantee integrity of elections data. The Strategy recommends the use of this technology at polling stations.

2. Ballot generators or scanning machines: Voting/Counting technology

There are several commercially available alternatives for the implementation of voting and counting technology at polling stations, each of them with their respective advantages and disadvantages.



Method	Main Features	Advantages	Disadvantages
Scanner machine	<p>During voting hours, each voter fills in the ballot paper and runs their ballot through the machine</p> <p>At close of polls, results are automatically produced and can be printed and/or transmitted to a central server</p>	<p>Maintains voters habits</p> <p>Auditability (keeps ballot papers for audit trail)</p>	<p>Ballot redesign with candidates on the back of the ballot for heavily contested elections</p> <p>Higher costs for the printing of ballot papers</p> <p>Paper jams. More common with long ballot papers</p> <p>Accuracy issues such as false positive votes due to dirt on the scanner lenses</p> <p>Does not improve the vote accessibility issues for blind voters</p> <p>Battery lifespan</p> <p>Proprietary equipment</p> <p>Cost of ownership including licensing, maintenance and storage costs</p>
Ballot generator	<p>Voters select candidates on the machine screen</p> <p>The machine prints the voted ballot paper with the selections and the paper is introduced in a ballot box</p> <p>At the close of polls, results are automatically counted, and can be manually recounted for audit.</p> <p>Results can be easily transmitted by optional EPBs or mobile devices</p>	<p>Saves printing costs</p> <p>Facilitates audits (printed voted ballot)</p> <p>Blind voters can vote with an audio guided user interface guaranteeing full privacy</p>	<p>Changes voter habits</p> <p>Voting takes longer particularly in concurrent elections</p> <p>Battery lifespan</p> <p>Cost of ownership including licensing, maintenance and storage costs</p>

Table 1 - Commercially available Voting/Counting technology features

What the Strategy recommends is focussing on the full implementation of the Electronic Pollbooks first, and to follow a piloting approach for the voting/counting machines across two-three Elections events. The piloting approach would allow a thorough assessment of the operational, security and cost effectiveness aspects of the implementation of voting/counting machines before a nation-wide deployment is decided. This approach is reflected in the Action Plan.

2.1.4 Strategic Line 4 - Continuous Improvement Model and the Role in Democracy Enhancement

This Strategic Line develops the methodology and tools to establish a formal record (audit trail) of all election's components. This is the first step in the roadmap to develop a Quality Management System (QMS) ready to get ISO 9001 certification.

This Strategic Line also looks into plans for continuous engagement with the rest of the election administration organisations to compile lessons learned after each election, collect inputs to improve internal processes and procedures, understand field operational challenges, support continuous improvement and promote an



organizational culture oriented towards continuous improvement in the services provided to citizens. This process will feed into the annual review of the Strategy and Action plan.

Additionally, CEC should consider broadening their role as an essential contributor to the enhancement of democracy in BiH. In this context, CEC could design plans to support the promotion of democratic values through education by engaging with schools, universities, NGOs and selected public institutions.

Continuous engagement with political parties to develop best practices in election observation or a code of practice to fight disinformation in the elections context, would also be considered.



3 Action Plan

When designing this Action Plan, the project team understood that there is a need to show progress to voters and stakeholders as fast as possible. Therefore, the Action Plan gives priority to those parts of the Strategy that would enable an efficient implementation and demonstrate better elections services to stakeholders very rapidly.

The Plan is designed in stages (tranches) around the two election events that may take place in a five-year period. Election events are when progress can best be demonstrated to the public.

Additionally, this staged approach would enable the balanced delivery of incremental functional and non-functional requirements of the solutions in the Strategy and the opportunity to enhance them with end-user improvements, while also guaranteeing that CEC maintains election business continuity at all times.

The Plan assumes four tranches in the five-year period. Each one would have a primary focus as follows:

- The **first tranche** would involve the delivery and implementation of the Action Lines that would enable the provision of accurate and fast elections results. It would involve the Actions Lines related to:
 - Processes map and organisational aspects
 - Candidate nomination system
 - Electronic pollbooks implementation
 - First pilot of Voting/Counting technology
 - Polling Stations Central Monitoring System
 - Central reception, consolidation and reporting of results

- The **second tranche** will provide the voters register management function. It will involve the Action Lines related to:
 - Central Voters Register technology platform
 - On-line ballot delivery (for out-of-country voting)
 - Polling Station Management System (GIS)

- The **third tranche** will focus on the incremental pilots of the Voting/Counting technology at polling stations and development of the MECs/CEC count centres support.

- The **fourth tranche** will set the grounds for ensuring sustainability of the progress achieved.

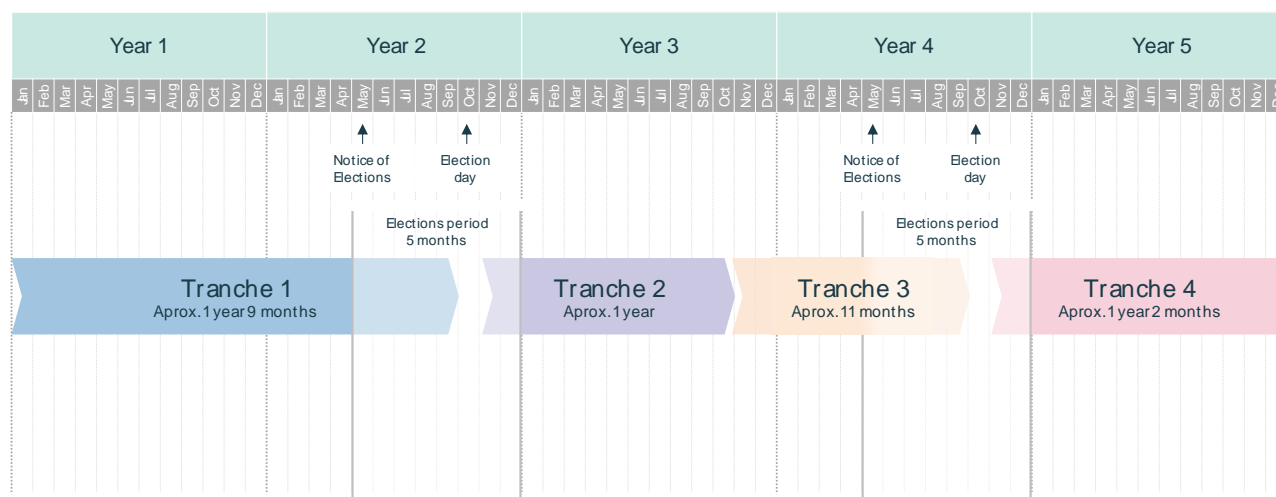


Figure 2 - The four tranches in the five-year Action Plan



To facilitate the delivery aspects of the Action Plan, the **39 Action Lines in the Strategy** have been clustered into **seven projects** according to priorities and dependencies between Action Lines. The seven projects would be delivered across the four tranches with an **incremental functionality approach**.

This arrangement of projects implementation timeframe into tranches with incremental functionalities will enable CEC to develop a multiannual budget planning, which would support the implementation of the full strategy over the five-year period. CEC will also be able to manage the use of resources more efficiently and to build election organisation capabilities with a long-term perspective thus ensuring sustainability of the progress achieved.

On the budget necessary to deliver the Action Plan, best estimates based on market research and experience are provided as part of the Action Plan. These estimates should be considered a broad approximation that need to be further fine-tuned but that could be used as a starting point when addressing the funding aspects of the delivery of the Strategy.

On the organisational aspects, CEC have limited resources and lack enough staff members and specialised profiles to successfully deliver the entire five-year Action Plan in-house, while concurrently running their day-to-day operations. Therefore, some of the projects in the Action Plan would need the support of external suppliers to provide the technology and skills necessary to develop and deploy them. Other projects could be delivered directly by CEC with a reinforced organisation including extra project managers and technologists.

Full details on the proposed Plan can be found in the attached document “*Strategy and Action Plan to Improve the Integrity, Transparency and Efficiency in the BiH Electoral Process. Part 2 – Action Plan*”.



4 Communication Strategy

The Communication Strategy will support the rebuilt of CEC credibility through operational excellence, transparency and crisis management practices. It will leverage on a proactive communications policy, making full use of modern ways of interacting with the stakeholder community.

CEC has a diverse and complex stakeholder community which includes citizens, political parties/candidates, other BiH institutions and Public Agencies, the Media, International Institutions including the EU and Multilaterals, NGO's and civil society organizations. Beyond improving the way CEC communicates with their stakeholders, the Communication Strategy focuses on engaging them more actively to construct valued relationships so that they understand CEC's transformation process, and uphold their reputation as a trusted electoral management body.

The Communication Strategy is designed along three priority areas:

- *Communicating achievements in the roadmap to operational excellence.* This priority area will support the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan with ad hoc communication initiatives to contribute to a public image consistent with the transformation process
- *Fostering transparency and raising public awareness.* This priority area will transform CEC's institutional communication tools (website and election event portal) to make them the reference hub for information on elections matters. It will also develop active communication initiatives on digital channels. Finally, it will design engagement activities to promote democratic values thus broadening CEC's role as an essential contributor to the enhancement of democracy in BiH.
- *Proactive communication and crisis management practices.* This priority line will focus on staying a step ahead on public discussions on electoral administration matters by actively sharing and disseminating CEC's work and vision. Additionally, this priority area will define the methodology for managing communication crises. The methodology will be based on the definition of crisis scenarios and the planning of coordinated responses.

The Communications Plan is the main tool to deliver on the Communication Strategy. The Plan contains seven Action Lines to engage stakeholders so that they understand and also contribute to CEC's transformation process.

Those Action Lines will make use of the following communication channels and initiatives:

- CEC institutional website that will be redesigned to make it more accessible and facilitate content management
- The Election event portal to gather all information for a particular electoral event
- Events and activities making full use of the CEC facilities (Centre for Education)
- Traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers) by launching public campaigns, interviews
- Social media and digital media outlets by launching digital public campaigns and using social listening tools
- Public Relations activities to support specific engagement initiatives
- Other engagement initiatives such as the organisation of workshops, seminars, development of partnerships with educational centres and universities etc...

The success of the different initiatives in the Communications Plan will be measured by monitoring stakeholders engagement evolution, their digital engagement and the performance of the Crisis Management plans. Some of the tools that will be used to monitor success would be:

- Regular surveys on general public, election administration staff and other key stakeholders regarding their vision, knowledge and commitment with CEC
- Data analytics on indicators collected through the digital social listening tools
- Feedback on use of website and elections portal
- Statistics on attendance at events organized by CEC and webinars

Full details on the proposed Communication Strategy can be found in the attached document "*Strategy and Action Plan to Improve the Integrity, Transparency and Efficiency in the BiH Electoral Process. CEC Communication Strategy*".

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