

## Q&A about the 2012 Women in Local Elections project

### **1. What is the OSCE Mission to BiH doing in relation to women's participation in the 2012 Local Elections?**

This year, the OSCE Mission to BiH is implementing a *Women in Local Elections* project in ten municipalities across BiH. The project consists of the following actions and objectives:

- to identify women's priorities at the grassroots level,
- to advocate for these priorities with political parties,
- to support women candidates through promotional campaigns, and
- to educate voters and political parties on women's political empowerment through the establishment of temporary resource centres.

The ten participating municipalities are Bratunac, Bugojno, Jezero, Kalesija, Novo Goražde, Olovo, Orašje, Posušje, Srebrenica and Zavidovići. The municipalities were selected based on the number of women in municipal councils/assemblies, young women's turnout at the 2008 Local Elections, and the availability of local partners. Strengthened women councillors and women's NGOs will help ensure that women's priorities identified in the project are addressed by local authorities after the elections.

### **2. What does the OSCE Mission to BiH aim to achieve with the project on Women in Local Elections?**

The OSCE Mission aims to increase women's political participation at the local level as voters and as elected representatives in municipal assemblies/councils. To achieve this, the Mission will strive to:

- Increase the turnout of women voters in Local Elections,
- Strengthen partnerships between women candidates and voters, and
- Increase women's representation in local representative bodies and public offices in 2012 compared to the 2008 Local Elections,

Furthermore, women will be supported to take a stronger role in local community councils, the grassroots level closest to citizens in rural and hard to reach areas. To enable this, municipalities should regulate the elections in local communities in such a way to ensure women's equal participation.

### **3. Why is the current quota for women in candidates' lists only 33 per cent and not 50 per cent?**

The BiH Election Law prescribes that a minimum of one-third of the candidates on the lists should be of the less-represented gender. Examples from other developing countries proved this quota can ignite sustainable social change towards factual equality in political participation, and is realistically achievable at the same time. The OSCE Mission supports the harmonization of the BiH Election Law with the Law on Gender Equality, which defines women's equal political participation when at least 40 per cent of the less-represented gender is ensured. This should also be the minimum for the election lists. A quota of 50 per cent is difficult to meet in societies where women are discouraged from taking public roles, though there are municipalities in BiH with close to equal participation of women and men in MAs/MCs. In these municipalities, women are better positioned than elsewhere to fight for equality in other spheres.

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**4. Do open lists limit the effects of the 33 per cent quota for women in lists, since voters rarely vote for them?**

Open lists are better for the democratization of society and ensure greater accountability of representatives towards the electorate. Closing the lists could increase the representation of women, but at the expense of other democratic principles. The OSCE Mission supports open lists which should be complemented by an affirmative action policy in terms of allocation of the seats to women in legislative and executive bodies.

**5. How will the OSCE Mission ensure that political parties put forward accomplished women candidates?**

The OSCE Mission cannot ensure that political parties put forward only accomplished women or men, but can support civil society organizations and watchdogs in the country that have been calling for a quality and non-discriminatory approach in nominating party candidates. Democratic maturity depends on the people of this country. The OSCE Mission can educate candidates, both men and women, on gender equality, ensuring their improved future engagement.

**6. How will the OSCE Mission ensure that the visibility of female candidates is increased?**

Candidates that join our local initiatives, by taking on the responsibility to advance gender equality once elected, will be promoted by their civil society partners in the pre-election campaign. Participation in public discussions and get-out-the-vote campaigns will also raise their visibility and provide opportunities to advocate for the grassroots priorities of women.

**7. What are the possible next legal steps to ensure true diversity at all levels of government?**

The harmonization of legislation at all levels with the Law on Gender Equality in BiH is a priority. Secondly, mechanisms put forward by the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination should be put to use to fight gender-based discrimination and multiple types of discrimination faced, for example, by Romani women or women with disabilities. Thirdly, existing action plans at different government levels for the advancement of gender equality should be budgeted for and implemented. However, all of this cannot result in social change unless trust and solidarity between women and men are built, and actions are taken to improve the responsiveness of elected officials to their needs.