

## Transcript

Following the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1996, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) faced a very complex task of implementing the multi-party elections, which were far from easy and smooth. Although it was planned that the OSCE would only conduct the first post-war elections, this practice continued until 2000.

My name is Irena Hadžiabdić and I served as an election officer in one of the OSCE's Field Offices. After being engaged with the OSCE for already more than 3 years, I had expected that the municipal elections scheduled for April 8, 2000 would be an easier task than previous elections. I got an international position in 1999, and my job was to organize election preparation, voting, and transfer of the results in cooperation with six local election commissions in my area of responsibility, which was half of one canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Municipal elections, as the fourth that OSCE implemented after the war, had brought significant modification in the area of election implementation. First of all, the decision was made not to hold the elections over two days, as it was before. Elections were held for a day, and that caused an increase in the number of designated polling stations. However, this change caused some problems, because the voters were not informed in time that their polling station was in a different location, and many voters voted by tendered (enveloped) ballots.

Provisional Election Commission designed rules and regulations for this election in January 2000. Election system stayed the same as for the 1998 elections – the system of proportional representation for municipal councils. According to the observation reports these municipal elections were free of violence and more fair than any previous elections in BiH. The high turnout (70%) was a proof of interest shown by the voters, but a number of organizational problems occurred. Vote secrecy was compromised because displaced persons put the ballot in an envelope with their name on it.

The collection of material from different polling stations after the Election Day did not occur according to the operational plan. The procedure of packing the material involved packing of the ballot box into a bag, and all bags were then transferred to the designated field offices. It happened that some ballot boxes were left at the polling station location due to misunderstanding by some members of polling station committees. It also happened in my area of responsibility where a polling station committee just locked the premises where elections were held and went home, leaving a ballot box there. I remember

deciding to travel to that rural area at three o'clock in the morning to pick up the missing ballot box.

Additionally when the big convoy of trucks, which was supposed to pick up all election material from the municipalities and transfer it to the capital of Sarajevo, arrived to the city there was no space in any of the 50 trucks for election material from my six municipalities. Someone had failed to properly calculate the amount of election material that will be collected due to the newly introduced open list system, which meant that the ballots were very big and it was not easy to predict the necessary number of vehicles.

The problem was that the election material from my area of responsibility had to wait an additional 3-4 days until new trucks were sent, and that meant that an additional operational plan for the necessary police and international security forces was needed to provide protection of the sensitive election material. (See the photo attached.)

Obviously, organization of post-war elections is a very demanding and exhausting process that requires a lot of detailed planning and backup solutions.