

 Austrian  
Embassy  
Sarajevo


  
British Embassy  
Sarajevo



  
Ambasciata d'Italia  
Sarajevo

  
Embassy of Japan




 **OSCE** Organization for Security and  
Co-operation in Europe  
Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina



 Švedska  
Sverige

Embassy of Switzerland in Bosnia and Herzegovina

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra



 **UN  
WOMEN**  
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

20 October 2020

Dear Editors,

These have been extraordinary times, and the pandemic has taken a great toll on the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as elsewhere. We want to take this opportunity to thank all journalists who continue to put themselves in harm's way, as frontline workers, to keep us all informed and aware.

With local election campaigning underway in BiH, this is a critical moment for citizens to choose who will represent them. The media is always a central part of such moments, and no less when restrictions on gatherings and movements are set to continue.

The EU Opinion, which is a milestone in EU-BiH relations, confirms the EU's commitment to guiding and supporting the country in undertaking the necessary reforms on its path towards European integration, and has made gender equality one of the main issues to be addressed in the 14 key priorities.

In light of this, we are writing to ask for your support in efforts to ensure these elections mark a positive step forward, in the manner in which they are conducted. Although women make up 51% of BiH's population, they are consistently under-represented in campaigns, in discussions, and ultimately in positions where decisions are made. Where legal minimums are met on voter lists, this is often undone by far less coverage for female candidates. A UNDP report showed that during General Elections in 2018 "female candidates appeared in only 3% of the analysed media reports, and only 3 women appeared as experts/political commentators". When they are included, women are often

presented in ways which reduce their authority or voice as compared to male candidates. As you know, in 2016, only 18% of local municipality/city council seats were secured by women and there were only six women elected as mayors.

In our view, this matters to everyone across BiH, because evidence from around the world proves that high levels of female participation in politics deliver better results for societies. Women in politics are more likely to prioritise public goods and services that benefit the whole community, such as improving public health services and expanding the provision and quality of education. The lack of women in decision-making roles is negatively impacting on this country's development, human rights, prosperity and success.

The actual experience of women in politics in this country is often far worse than their male counterparts, characterised by abuse and threats, particularly online. They are often reduced to a stereotypical image, for example through organisation of voting for "the prettiest candidate". Where their voice is presented, female candidates are rarely asked questions related to their expertise or policies, there is a focus on appearance or private life, or they are otherwise taken less seriously than male candidates. We are actively pursuing these points with political party leaders.

We also seek a deepened dialogue with you as the representatives of a cornerstone of democracy. Free media – both traditional and social – plays a vital role in any democracy. Indeed, there is no democracy without a free media with high standards of editorial quality and objectivity. Although the onus for change is on political party leadership, as the key decision-makers of what makes the news, you play a role as guardians of democracy here in BiH. That's why we're asking you to take a lead during the 2020 local elections to ensure the voices of female candidates are heard.

We hope that together we can lead the way in showing how an inclusive and sustainable democracy in BiH can deliver benefits for all of your readers, listeners and viewers.

Yours sincerely,



Ulrike Hartmann  
Ambassador



Dr Ruth Wiseman  
Chargée d'affaires a.i.



Johann Sattler  
EU Ambassador to Bosnia  
and Herzegovina/EUSR



Nicola Minasi  
Ambassador

Sakamoto Hideyuki  
Ambassador

Reinout Vos  
Ambassador

Kathleen Kavalec  
Ambassador

Jose Maria Valdemoro  
Gimenez  
Ambassador

Torgny Svenungsson  
Chargée d'affaires a.i.

Barbara Dätwyler  
Scheuer  
Chargée d'affaires a.i.

Eric Nelson  
Ambassador

John Kennedy Mosoti  
Representative

David Saunders  
Representative