

LM COMMENTARY

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Preparing **Bosnia** For Democracy

As election-time looms again in **Bosnia** the buzz-word is 'democratisation'. After a year of postponements the registration process for the September municipal elections ended on June 28. Our man in Sarajevo David **Chandler** explains why the only people being empowered in this election are the Great Powers that run the country

The Dayton Peace Agreement, imposed by US diplomatic and military force, legalises the international protectorate over **Bosnia** but makes no mention of any mandate to 'democratise' the people of the new state. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was mandated to 'supervise' the conduct of elections and to ensure they are 'free and fair'. The term 'supervision' has been interpreted broadly. The Head of the OSCE **Bosnia** Mission, US Ambassador Frowick, has the final power of decision as the Chair of the Provisional Election Committee (PEC) which lays down election rules. In May the PEC published an 84 page set of draconian regulations. These upcoming elections have pushed the mandate to new extremes, as the OSCE Mission Public Affairs Officer proudly stated 'these elections are the most supervised elections anywhere, ever'.

For the first time registration is mandatory for all those wishing to vote, and all information has been computerised to enable precise monitoring. International supervisors are in charge of every registration and polling station, ensuring compliance with the OSCE Voter Registration Manual which lays down every imaginable regulation from security procedures down to the number of ball point pens, pencils and pencil sharpeners each station is to have (two, sixteen and four respectively).

Infringing any of the 500-plus electoral regulations can result in candidates and even parties being struck off the election lists. In the Republica Srpska entity, for example, for contraventions ranging from insulting foreign monitors to election irregularities, the OSCE has struck off a number of SDS candidates and permanently banned them from public office, removed several registration centre chairmen and decertified the SDS from one municipality entirely. OSCE penalties sometimes impose 'collective guilt' to create examples; in response to an assault on returning Serb refugees in Drvar the first name on the Croatian HDZ party list was barred permanently from public office.

The run up to the elections has meant a special focus on 'democratising' the media, which for the OSCE means developing the capacity 'to monitor and enforce compliance with Provisional Election Commission rules'. The OSCE Media Development Strategy for 1997 includes the support of media not influenced by the government or the major parties, the compilation of a database on all individuals involved in the media, surveys to establish the key media to be influenced and 'extensive use of mandatory broadcast or publication of materials' chosen by the OSCE chaired and selected Media Experts Commission. There are harsh penalties for 'media violations' which can include anything that infringes the regulations on political neutrality, balanced and impartial information, inaccuracy or inflammatory language.

Controlling the election process may well not be enough to undermine the support of the three main nationalist parties seeking to renew their popular mandates of opposition to the Bosnian state imposed by Dayton. That is why this year 'democratisation' has become a central aspect of the OSCE's presence in **Bosnia** with the establishment of an OSCE Democratisation Branch and full-time Democratisation Officers based in every OSCE regional and field office. Their job is to pressurise the main parties through setting up and supporting 'grass-roots' opposition projects which they encourage to become 'citizens groups' and NGOs. If the elections fail to bring the right result the OSCE will attempt to bring together these unelectable 'citizens groups' as a 'Shadow Government' or a 'Citizens Alternative Parliament' representing the 'true voice of the people' as judged by the unaccountable, US funded democracy experts.

David **Chandler** will be speaking at the New Democratic Order dayschool on 29th July 1997 at the University of London Union, London W1. Further details are available from:

<http://www.informinc.co.uk/LM/tns/index.html>