



**POVELJA GRAĐANA**

#GlasZaOdgovornostNaMrežama

# Citizens' charter on responsible use of social media for elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Centre for  
Humanitarian  
Dialogue

*Mediation for peace*

# Preamble

Motivated by the need for greater participation of citizens in democratic processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH),

Disturbed by the increase in harmful content on social media ahead of the elections,

Worried about the malign influence of social media on the development of political attitudes of citizens in BiH,

United in the idea of minimising hate speech and harmful content, harassment, disinformation, dirty campaigning and inauthentic activity on social media,

Determined that free and fair elections become a reality in BiH,

*We, the citizens of BiH, appeal to political actors, media, journalists, social media platforms and users of social media to accept this Charter, in order to ensure that social media becomes a place of positive public discourse.*

# About the citizens who wrote the document

The Citizens Forum is a diverse group of people from BiH. Participants were recruited from a public call, and were selected by stratified random sampling.

Over four days together, the Forum was supported by independent facilitators to deliberate on the following question:

As BiH is preparing for elections, what do citizens expect from political actors, media, social media platforms and each other – to ensure that social media can be a place of positive public discourse?

At the Forum, we heard from a range of experts, who helped us explore the challenges of social media in BiH. To assist in the analysis of information and evidence, the group used critical thinking tools and had time for deep deliberation. Participants shared their experiences and reflections on the topic, worked together and came to consensus on this Charter.

We are citizens gathered from different regions of BiH, of different ethnic and religious affiliations, ages, genders and levels of education, and we are united in the belief that together we can contribute to positive change. We gathered with the aim of adopting a Charter that prescribes standards of behaviour in the online space, with a focus on the electoral process.

# Challenge

Due to the lack of legal regulation, low levels of media and digital literacy and poorly developed critical thinking, citizens of BiH are exposed to online manipulation on social media by political actors who deploy hate speech, harassment, bots, trolls, and fake profiles and pages. This has a detrimental effect on public opinion, the integrity of the electoral process, and the election results.

# Our vision for social media in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Our vision is to create a safe online space where hate speech, disinformation, fake news, harassment, bots, trolls and manipulation are minimised, respect for freedom of speech is upheld, with the goal of free and fair elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Principles for responsible behaviour on social media

In order to improve the online space, we concluded that social media use should adhere to the following principles: mutual respect and preservation of dignity, safety, privacy, accuracy of information, honesty, and well-being.

# Standards for responsible use of social media

- Standards for politicians, parties and candidates
- Standards for social media platforms
- Standards for media and journalists
- Standards for users of social media
- Standards for international institutions
- Standards for public institutions and the non-governmental sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina

# Standards for politicians, parties and candidates

They should post accurate and verified information about themselves and their political opponents on social media.

They should not manipulate public opinion in order to achieve their desired election results.

They should respect the provisions of the Law on Misdemeanors of BiH, the Criminal Code of BiH and the Election Law of BiH, i.e. existing laws in BiH related to harassment in public spaces and on social media.

They should not disseminate threats or calls for violence, nor use insulting words, inflammatory speech and labelling, which could lead to harassment of citizens or other political subjects.

They should adopt a specific code of conduct on social media, which would, among other things, refer to harassment on social media during the electoral process, or incorporate it into their own internal acts and Statute. This aforementioned code should also contain provisions on refraining from harmful narratives (with reference to vulnerable categories, such as women, members of the LGBTQ population, returnees, etc.), and provisions condemning and sanctioning members of political entities who harass others on social media. In addition, when adopting the aforementioned code, political actors should pay special attention to the provisions regarding respect for their political opponents.

They should not ideologically or financially encourage or publish content that contains hate speech and discrimination on social media during the electoral process.

They should educate members of their public relations teams about running an honest election campaign.

On social media, they should only advertise on their official profiles and pages.

They should not engage troll farms, bots, fake profiles and pages on social media with the aim of self-promotion, and/or discrediting and attacking political opponents.

They should be transparent about the financing of their advertising and promotion on social networks.

# Standards for social media platforms

They should cooperate with public institutions and the non-governmental sector, to improve and apply their internal rules, with the aim of reducing the spread of disinformation during the election process. (For example, more active monitoring of content posted on social media, algorithmic flagging of potential disinformation, encouraging the responsible action of users on social media, greater sensitivity to linguistic specificities through a greater regional presence, mandatory introduction of sanctions on political entities that spread disinformation on social media. Companies should not allow monetisation for articles and publishers that spread disinformation).

They should ensure transparency in the fight against disinformation (e.g. through public disclosure of accurate statistical data and reasons for sanctioning certain candidates and political entities).

They should promote the creation of mechanisms for reporting incidents of harassment (through education, promotion, TV campaigns, pop-up help, banners, as well as filters warning of potentially disturbing content, etc.).

They should prevent and sanction the creation of fake profiles.

They should establish a partnership with non-governmental organisations in BiH with the aim of making it easier to report hate speech.

They should publicly display statistical data on the number of posts by political entities and candidates that have been removed for containing hate speech.

They should work on introducing more precise algorithms for identifying bots, trolls and fake profiles based on their age, activity, time intervals of commenting, and (non)publishing of other content.

Potential bots should be flagged so that followers recognise potentially inauthentic content, especially in the period after the announcement of election results.

They should perform mandatory verification of political entities and candidates when registering profiles and pages.

# Standards for media and journalists

They should respect and adhere to their professional code when reporting on social media, especially during the election process.

Before posting information, they should verify the accuracy and credibility of the information.

They should adhere to the ethical and professional standards adopted by the Communications Regulatory Agency (RAK) and the Press Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

They should introduce regular sections that indicate harassment or affirmative action in the direction of recognising and sanctioning harassment on social networks.

They should be actively involved in public campaigns that highlight the consequences of harassment on social media.

They should not download and publish content from social media related to harassment and abusive practices by political entities and/or candidates.

They should not create and share content that contains hate speech and discrimination, and, especially, not encourage their own promotion through sensationalist headlines.

They should dedicate themselves to educating citizens about the harmful effects of inauthentic behaviour on social media (bots and trolls), especially in the period after the announcement of elections (this recommendation applies exclusively to private media).

They should not disseminate information that is associated with inauthentic behaviour on social media (e.g. bots and trolls).

# Standards for users of social media

They should share verified and accurate information on their private profiles, and report content they suspect is disinformation.

They should not download and publish content from social media related to harassment and abuse by political entities and/or candidates, especially during the election process.

They should inform themselves about the dangers and ways to protect themselves from potential harassment and abuse on social media.

They should not create, share, promote or support content containing hate speech.

They should report social media content containing hate speech to competent institutions, such as the Central Election Commission, so that the perpetrators can be appropriately sanctioned.

They should publicly share their experiences about the consequences of hate speech on social media during the election process.

They should inform themselves about the internal rules of social media platforms related to the prevention of hate speech.

They should inform themselves about the possibility of checking statistical data on the number of removed posts on user profiles that contain hate speech, which should be made available by social media platforms.

They should report potential inauthentic behaviour on social media (e.g. bots and trolls), especially during the election process.

# Standards for international institutions

They should suggest and promote examples of positive behaviour on social media through support to projects and programs aimed at preventing the spread of disinformation, creating a safe internet space, and affirmative public communication practices.

They should advocate the introduction of legal regulations from the European Union (EU) and the rest of the world in BiH.

They should encourage increased monitoring and sanctioning of hate speech on social media during the election process.

They should support the education of political entities and candidates with the aim of preventing hate speech during the election process.

They should provide support to organisations and institutions that monitor and/or educate citizens about safer use of social media, i.e. recognising inauthentic behaviour (e.g. bots and trolls), especially during the election process.

# Standards for public institutions and the non-governmental sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina

They should have better mutual cooperation in the sphere of raising media/digital literacy through formal and informal education of citizens.

They (public institutions) should ensure and encourage the monitoring of social media during the election process (by the non-governmental sector), with a focus on inauthentic behaviour on social media (such as bots and trolls).

Public institutions should encourage the creation of a safe online space where victims of harassment on social media can freely share their experiences without fear of being further threatened.