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## Press Release

Podgorica, August 31, 2016

Dear Media Representatives,

Centre for Democracy and Human Rights-CEDEM sent **a request to State Election Commission for free access to information regarding the control of collecting signatures of voters supporting the electoral lists** that will be nominated for the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 16 this year. Since there is a reasonable suspicion that the individual electoral lists process of collecting signatures will execute on an illegal way, we draw your attention to the following:

1. We call upon the **State Electoral Commission to announce the methodology by which it will carry out verification of the collected signatures**, ie. check whether the electoral list by its signature is supported by the only one voter, and thus prevent possible misuse and falsification of signatures by those submitters of electoral lists that elections are using solely for the purpose of obtaining funds from the state budget in an illegal manner. We expect that the SEC will provide a technological solution according to which every citizen typing their Unique Identification number in particular the application could verify whether it is a signatory of some electoral lists and which one.
2. Also, we appeal to the applicants of all electoral lists **to provide insight into the collected signatures to all interested observers accredited to observe the elections**, and thus demonstrate a willingness to enter into election procedure in a legal and transparent manner.

3. We remind the **citizens/voters that by its own signature can support only one election list**, and that giving signatures contrary to this provision shall be subject to their misdemeanor liability in the amount of 500 to 2000 euros.

Analysis of the results of parliamentary elections since the restoration of independence until today indicates that a **certain number of electoral lists achieved a significantly lower number of votes in relation to the number the collected signatures for their candidacy**. According to unofficial announcements, it is expected to participate in the next elections between 15 and 20 submitters of electoral lists, that must collect at least a total of 60 000, and between 70 000 signatures of voters, or about 11% of the total electorate. This information, as well as the practice of many years of lack of clear, valid and transparent control of the process of collecting signatures of voters and nomination of candidate lists by the State Election Commission, are leading to serious doubts about the ability of some of the candidate lists lawfully collect the necessary signatures.

Bearing in mind the legal obligation of the **State Election Commission determines the electoral list within 48 hours after its submission**, as well justified question arises as to how the Commission will check the signatures of voters who have supported the electoral lists. This is particularly bearing in mind that the SEC does not have the ability to exercise control of signatures of voters electronically for those applicants electoral lists that can possibly decide to collect signatures in this manner.

Also, we believe that the provisions of the Criminal Code of Montenegro, in the chapter relating to criminal offenses against electoral rights, needs to be supplemented in terms of the introduction of falsifying signatures of voters as a separate criminal offense.

CEDEM has submitted an application to the State Election Commission for accreditation of its observers to engage in the electoral process and logistical assistance to the commission acts in terms of monitoring the lawful of collecting signatures by the electoral lists. Although aware of possible limitations imposed by the law on personal data protection in terms of monitoring the collection signatures of voters, we appreciate that it is at this point **necessary to protect the public interest, in order not to manipulate by support of the electoral lists, forged the will of the voters and ultimately, abused from the state budget**.

Best regards,

CEDEM – Centre for Democracy and Human Rights