OPEN LETTER OF THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA INSTITUTE OF STATISTIC

Dear Mr. Wigemark,

Since we highly appreciate the high position of the Head of the Delegation and the EU Special Representative to BiH and you personally, especially your transparency and openness while expressing the official views, we wish to address you with an open letter, because we believe that the media and the general public in BiH should know more about the position of the Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics, as one of the pillars of the census operations carried out in BiH and Republika Srpska. We believe that your views regarding the Census are objective. On 1 July 2016, after the Census results were published by the Agency for Statistics of BiH (BHAS), most of the media covered your statement that “one should be careful when claiming that these results are in line with international standards, because this is yet to be established, and that the final assessment of the International Monitoring Operation will cover all activities leading to the distribution of final results”. Your opinion, which is extremely important and welcomed by us, is that the IMO will assess the quality of the Census, upon detailed analysis, and that the assessment of the data processing and distribution phase will take place in autumn. In your media statement of 13 July 2016, you also emphasized that evaluation results should be available in early September or in October. You claimed that Census results are undeniable, but that the data processing is controversial, in terms of the methodology and resident/non-resident status.

As you know, we have not addressed you directly before. However, now we have an immediate, urgent and specific reason to timely inform you and the public about the unexplained preparation of the environment for Census results published by BHAS to be verified as fair and impartial, although it is clear that there are no basic conditions for such a thing. Here we are talking about the Postenumeration Survey.

To be precise, Article 6 of the Law on Census BiH defines that Post-enumeration Survey (PES) will be carried out on a representative sample of enumeration areas, in order to assess the coverage and quality of data collected through the Census, and the main purpose of PES is to quantify Census coverage errors, using the rates of overcoverage and undercoverage. These indicators are highly important for users of Census data, as they provide a concrete measure of Census data quality.

A repeated enumeration of persons in the representative sample of enumeration areas showed that 11% of persons enumerated during the main Census were missing in the field during the PES. It must be noted that the first day of PES enumeration was only 17 days after the end of enumeration in the Census, which gives extra significance to the preliminary coverage indicators, showing that there were manipulations on the field during the main Census.

Taking into account preliminary analyses of the PES working group, it is clear that it is highly probable that the overcoverage rate is very high in comparison with similar indicators of coverage quality in the region. Thus, we believe that it is very important to put maximum efforts into assessing the given parameter as fairly as possible.

As part of the Technical Assistance Project for Data Processing in the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in BiH 2013, a mission is being carried out between 11 July and 15 July 2016, whose purpose is support to data processing of PES.

However, currently, during the development of an assessment strategy for coverage quality indicators, technical assistance experts expressed the opinion that PES cannot be used at all while calculating the overcoverage rate, because it was not designed for this purpose at first place, while all attempts at assessing this indicator cannot be useful or interpreted as the participation of persons who do not belong to the Census target population.

Such position is not in line with findings in the report for previous missions (16 to 20 February 2015) of the same experts, within technical assistance. Namely, in this report it is claimed (page 5, paragraph 4) that the undercoverage rate is insignificant in comparison with the overcoverage, with a proposal several possible strategies to assess the overcoverage rate. **This surely means that experts are “not sure” what can or cannot be done using the PES data, because their position changed completely between these two consecutive missions.**

In addition, on 13 July 2016, experts proposed to completely ignore persons who were enumerated as residents in the Census if they cannot be matched with persons enumerated in PES, because their opinion was that there was no concrete evidence in the data that these persons do not belong to the target population. **Experts seem to ignore the fact that we have a large number of persons who were enumerated as residents in the Census, while they were not enumerated in PES.** The position of experts is that it is more probable that the enumeration of persons in PES was not proper, that is, that certain persons who could have been matched with the problematic Census contingent were not enumerated at all. This means that experts believes that the Census implementation was of higher quality than the PES implementation. **This claim cannot be justified or supported by evidence. Quite contrary, bearing in mind the fact that fieldwork staff in PES was selected from among the enumerators who were assessed as best in the Census and the fact that the fieldwork organisation is realistically less complex in PES, we can only claim that the situation is exactly the opposite.**

In addition, the experts have been consciously neglecting good practices of the countries in the region in the implementation of quality control for Census, that is, solutions for an assessment strategy which would be much more adequate for the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in BiH in 2013.

The Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics believes that technical assistance experts **do not have a clear opinion on the assessment strategy for Census quality indicators and that they have been consciously neglecting obvious facts which were of utmost importance for quality indicators.**

Keeping in mind the importance of PES, the Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics insists on an end to such practices, because otherwise all quality indicators will most probably be biased. As such, they cannot provide an adequate basis for data users to make proper conclusions.

**In other words, it is obvious that international experts are attempting, contrary to the Law on Census, to “overthrow’ the PES, although it is an internationally recognized procedure for assessing census quality.** Obviously, the intention is clear – the Census cannot be verified as fair and impartial by IMO mission if we have PES results that confirm the enormous overcoverage of persons in the Census.

We wish to remind the public, because you are well aware of this, that the IMO mission has been present in BiH based on the Memorandum of Understanding on the International Monitoring Operation for the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in BiH 2012/2013, concluded by the Council of Ministers of BiH, on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The preamble to this document explicitly stipulates that the Census is organized and implemented by authorities, bodies and institutions in BiH, in accordance with the Law on Census. The task of IMO is to verify a fair and impartial enumeration and to build confidence in the Census.

It is evident that there is no confidence in the Census, which means that IMO has had no success in these terms, while there are also no conditions to verify a fair and impartial enumeration. The situation will be such as long as we have biased individuals in the field, and we want to believe that these individuals were not sent here with an aim of overthrowing or remodeling the PES. We are sure that the European Union did not provide money and assistance for the Census for such purposes.

With this letter, the Institute wishes to warn you timely about the attempts to circumvent the regulations and to overthrow the purpose and results of PES. The Institute cannot allow this, so we are addressing you and the general public, in order to prevent such activities immediately.

Kind regards,

Director General

Radmila Čičković, PhD