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## Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Weekly Newsletter* No. 10

### Serbia after the Election: What next?

A week after the May 11 parliamentary, provincial and local elections, Serbia still has no knowledge as to who will govern her in the time to come.

Apart from the indeed encouraging results of the election – a convicting majority of the *Democratic Party* (DS) and a serious downfall of the extreme rightist and xenophobic *Serbian Radical Party's* (SRS) popularity, as well as a serious setback of [hitherto Prime Minister] **Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia** (DSS) – Serbian politics has assumed a new quality politicians and the public at large at home and abroad will have to seriously count with: European Union and the country's European future will continue to play a speedily increasing role in Serbia's politics in spite of the sharp 50:50% split of the electorate on the matter: **Koštunica's** fanaticism on Kosovo will be able to attract less and less support even if he should manage to stay in power. Even if the increased presence of the European idea is centered at the expected inflow of EU money to assist Serbia's accelerated development rather than an opportunity to interiorize the value system dominant in European democracies, that process is bound to take momentum and become irreversible. This represents by far the most important feature of the post-election Serbia, and an opportunity serious politicians and other public servants should miss under no circumstances.

The election results showed that DS's relative majority does not suffice for a coalition of European-minded parties<sup>1</sup> - an unfortunate circumstance that can push the basically pro-European Democrats into a utilitarian alliance with (post)**Milošević** Socialists, which is certain to force them into painful programmatic concessions and unprincipled compromises.

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<sup>1</sup> Even if the DS and its leader, Serbia's President **Tadić** should give up their animosity towards the *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) and pool their mandates together with those of ethnic minorities parties', such a coalition of European-minded forces would not attain the required majority of 126 in the 250-seat *People's Assembly*.





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The ongoing negotiations on coalition arrangements both at the level of City of Belgrade and of the Republic of Serbia<sup>2</sup> appear to be dirtier than the election campaign itself. A multitude of possibilities on the table, there are two general directions further developments can take:

- either the DS manages to conclude a mutually acceptable arrangement with the coalition around the SPS (or parts thereof) and build a nominally pro-European coalition; or
- a coalition is formed of “patriotic” and anti-European parties led by **Koštunica** and the Radicals’ Deputy President<sup>3</sup> **Nikolić**<sup>4</sup> who are making efforts to win the Socialists to join what would definitely represent their more natural political *habitat*.

There are several features determining the post-election climate in Serbia:

1. Most of the energy, time and other resources are funneled in the bargaining on the distribution of power rather than a comprehensive debate on how to tackle the accumulated problems of Serbia’s society and economy. There is an increasing certainty that any new government will continue to be what its predecessor was: a confederation of ministries without a mechanism of checks and balances known in well organized and efficient democracies, whereby political influence will turn into an instrument to reward the loyal “soldiers of the Party” with *sinecures* such as ministerial and ambassadorial posts, seats on managing boards of major state-owned companies, control over major media etc.

2. The *Socialist Party of Serbia* (SPS), founded 1990 by **Slobodan Milošević**, plays a key role in these negotiations. The SPS – one of the winners of this election, whose specific weight lies in the election arithmetic rather than in its own merits (see both tables below) - finds itself before a dramatic choice:

- To embark on a process that would effectively (though not formally: **Tadić** has already absolved<sup>5</sup> it by promoting it into a “dynamic, pragmatic party we share the same political ideals [of the *Socialist International*] with”) distance itself from its own

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<sup>2</sup> Distribution of mandates in the City Council of Belgrade is equally deadlocked as in Serbian Parliament, and the SPS holds the balance of powers in both.

<sup>3</sup> SRS President **Vojislav Šešelj** is presently on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity at the ICTY in The Hague – a fact that did not prevent the election authorities in Serbia to leave his name at the top of his party’s ticket, nor did it annoy the representatives of the international community who observe the elections and the situation in Serbia in general.

<sup>4</sup> On May 16 and 17 **Nikolić** visited **Šešelj** in the ICTY Scheveningen Detention Unit and returned to Belgrade with the latter’s endorsement for the SRS’s efforts to form a coalition with **Koštunica** and the Socialists.

<sup>5</sup> Uncritical attitude towards the SPS reaches far beyond political opportunism dictated by the necessity to appease a potential coalition partner: even personalities such as the *Socialist International* President **George Papandreou** or the British Ambassador to Serbia did not remain immune to outbursts of flattery addressed to that party and its leader.





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past and the misfortunes that befell Serbia and her neighbors while the SPS was in power; or

- To join forces with **Koštunica's** *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DSS) and the SRS and (temporarily) slow down the inevitable process of Serbia's approach to Europe.

3. Only in most unfavorable of conditions will **Vojislav Koštunica** be willing to put up with not continuing to be Prime Minister. Even more stubbornly will he cling onto the control of the Interior Ministry and the state security service, the all-mighty *Security and Information Agency* (BIA): it is primarily to him that the BIA owes having been abolished from whatever responsibility for everything it had committed while loyally and dutifully serving **Milošević** and his regime. It is therefore only "natural" that **Koštunica** will avail himself of the secret police's plentiful resources<sup>6</sup> in attempting to secure a decisive say in Serbian politics.

5. There is unanimity in rejecting the *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) and its president **Čedomir Jovanović** – the only parliamentary force unequivocally in favor of a radical break with the recent past.

6. President **Tadić** still refuses to disclose the name of DS's candidate for premiership. At the same time he insists that he "would prevent with all legal and democratic means" that a party that has lost the election be entrusted with government formation – a statement observers tend to interpret as his resolve to prevent a DSS/SRS government at the price of riots and/or repeated election. Some observers are prepared to go as far as to predict that

the negotiations will be dragged on until shortly before the deadline and thus attempt to impose a *fait accompli*: a "national unity government" (with the LDP left out) as a lesser evil than a new election.

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<sup>6</sup> These include classified information on numerous members of the political and business elites - especially on their involvement in various corruption and other scandals - that can easily be taken out of safety vaults and used as trump cards in power struggles.





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### **Preliminary election results:**

<b>Final results estimate<sup>7</sup></b>		<b>Republic Election Commission (98.3% of votes counted)</b>	
		<b>%</b>	<b>mandates<sup>8</sup></b>
1	<i>For a European Serbia - Boris Tadić</i>	<b>38.44</b>	<b>102 (64)</b>
2	<i>Liberal Democratic Party – Čedomir Jovanović</i>	<b>5.24</b>	<b>13</b>
3	<i>Democratic Party of Serbia/New Serbia –Vojislav Koštunica</i>	<b>11.59</b>	<b>30 (47)</b>
4	<i>Serbian Radical Party - dr Vojislav Šešelj</i>	<b>29.36</b>	<b>78 (81)</b>
5	<i>Socialist Party of Serbia/PUPS/Unified Serbia</i>	<b>7.60</b>	<b>20 (16)</b>
6	<i>Bosniak List for a European Sanjak – dr Sulejman Ugljanin</i>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>2</b>
7	<i>Hungarian Coalition –Pasztor Istvan</i>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>4</b>
8	<i>Albanians' Coalition of the Preševo Valley – Riza Halimi</i>	<b>0.39</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Turnout</b>		<b>60.69%</b>	

<sup>7</sup> Due to minor irregularities detected in several polling stations, ballots were cast there on May 18 again, which will postpone the publication of final results until May 22 which will, in turn, put off the overall deadline till late September, possibly early October.

<sup>8</sup> In brackets: score 2007.





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This election featured weak results scored by ethnic minorities' parties such as the Roma (who had two deputies in the previous legislature) as a result of administrative hurdles<sup>9</sup> and political manipulation. On the other hand, Hungarian minority's success came as a result of their parties' unified election list, whereas the two Bosniak lists from Sanjak were allied with the DS and DSS respectively.

### **Outlook:**

With no final outcome of the election in terms of clear prospects for viable governments at different levels, political instability continues to jeopardize the country's much needed turn towards modernization and membership in the family of prosperous democratic nations.

Based on the hitherto experience, no dramatic turns can be expected in this regard any time soon, unless a broad-scale engagement of democratically minded forces – civil society organizations in particular – reinforce their efforts in awareness-raising aimed at the further promotion of the European idea.

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<sup>9</sup> A provision in the election legislation was altered shortly before the election: instead of 3.000 signatures required to register a party's election lists, ethnic minorities' parties now must submit 10,000 signatures – the same number as others.

