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## Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Newsletter* No. 40

### Local elections in Voždovac, Zemun and Kosjerić – a warning sign to the central government

After the July 2008 change in central government, the newly struck coalition between **Boris Tadić's Democratic Party** (DS) and **Milošević/Dačić's Socialist Party of Serbia** (SPS) necessitated a "new edition" of local governments in two municipalities in Belgrade and a small town in Western Serbia. As a result, SPS councilors in these municipalities helped topple their hitherto coalition partners from the *Serbian Radical Party* (SRS - **Šešelj**) and provoked new elections.

New local elections were held on June 7, 2009 in the Belgrade municipalities of Voždovac and Zemun, as well as in a small town of Kosjerić near Užice. Although the outcome of local elections in three (out of a total of 176) municipalities can not be viewed as a representative sample from which far-reaching conclusions relating to the national level can be drawn, the June 7 results are indicative of the political climate in Serbia a year after the last parliamentary election.

#### **Voždovac** (turnout: 32.6% of registered voters; total seats: 56)<sup>1</sup>

Presented in this table are the results made public by the Municipal Election Commission and published at the B92 website on June 8, 2000.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to alleged irregularities, voting will be repeated at three polling stations on Sunday, Jun. 14. Until then, there will be no official results.



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<b>Party/Coalition</b>	<b>% votes</b>	<b>Seats</b>	<b>Nat. elect. 2008</b>
For a European Voždovac Boris Tadić (ZES)	29.70	18	38.42
SNS	29.33	17	29.46 <sup>2</sup>
SRS	7.14	4	
DSS/NS/NP	12.50	7	11.62
SPS/PUPS/JS	8.93	5	7.58
LDP	5.36	3	5.24
List for Tolerance	3.50	2	/

**Zemun** (turnout: 36.5%; total seats: 57)

<b>Party/Coalition</b>	<b>% votes</b>	<b>Seats</b>
For a European Zemun Boris Tadić (ZES)	28.3	19
SNS	33.5	22
DSS/NS/NP	7.3	5
SPS/PUPS/JS	7	4
SRS	9.5	6
LDP	Under 5%	0
List for Tolerance	2.2	1

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<sup>2</sup> A unified SRS existed at the time of the election.



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### **Kosjerić** (turnout: 68%, total seats: 27)

Party/Coalition	% votes	Seats
DS/	26,6	8
G17+ <sup>3</sup>	5,6	1
SNS	13,8	4
DSS/NS/NP	13	8
SPS/PUPS/JS	12	4
SPO <sup>4</sup>	8,2	2
SRS	2,5	0
LDP	4,3	0

### **Main features**

**1.** Poor turnover in Belgrade municipalities testifies, *inter alia*, to a very low level of confidence citizens have in institutions. Despite powerful campaigns with full participation of central party leaderships and key personalities, voters seem to care less and less for the democratic electoral process: huge economic problems; endemic corruption in all walks of life (especially visible on the communal level in health care, education, judiciary, housing construction and real estate speculation); gross negligence of social welfare issues and vulnerable groups; outdated, inefficient and expensive utilities; catastrophic shape of the infrastructure and other facilities etc., represent questions to which citizens get no timely and viable answers from the elected authorities.

**2.** SNS appears to be the actual winner and the most dangerous rival to DS. Depending on DS's ability to keep the current crisis in griff, fight corruption and control the increasing danger of social unrest, SNS may capitalize on its growing relevance at the national level.

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<sup>3</sup> DS and G17+ ran separately in Kosjerić.

<sup>4</sup> SPO contested the election as a separate party in Kosjerić.



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**3.** Consolidation of the coalition around **Dačić's** SPS and its continued establishment as a legitimate political factor whose role in the ruining of Serbia and the 1990s wars waged against Serbia's former „sister republics“ is largely forgiven (if not forgotten).

**4.** Increasingly sharp division between DS and SNS, each of them flanked by smaller (ideologically) satellite parties (SPS and LDP on the left, DSS and SRS on the right – this does not necessarily mean that full-fledged alliances on each of these wings are feasible any time soon) – a type of polarization of Serbia's political landscape **Boris Tadić** would like to „import“ into Serbia and bring about a two-party political scene in a presidential system.

**5.** Disastrous defeat of **Šešelj's** Radicals: the strongest individual party<sup>5</sup> until only a year ago, SRS (was) split in October 2008 and brought down to a splinter party level. The fact that the SRS will continue to be the strongest opposition force in the national Parliament on the basis of the last national election results, will put the government to a new test: how to bridge the gap between the Radicals' nominal strength and actual influence, and minimize their obstruction capacity (and inclinations)?

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<sup>5</sup> After the May 2008 election, SRS had 72 out of a total of 250 seats in Parliament, whereas the DS (if considered without its coalition partners had mandates).



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### **Abbreviations:**

**ZES:** Coalition consisting of *Democratic Party* (DS – **B. Tadić**), G17+ (**M Dinkić**); *Serbian Renewal Movement* (SPO – **V. Drašković**) - presently ruling in Serbia;

**SNS:** *Serbian Progressive Party* (SNS – **T. Nikolić**) created after a split in the *Serbian Radical Party* /SRS – **V. Šešelj**/ 2008;

**DSS/NS/NP:** *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DSS – **V. Koštunica**); *New Serbia* (NS - **V. Ilić**) and *People's Party* (NP - **M. Gojković**<sup>6</sup>);

**SPS/PUPS/JS:** *Socialist Party of Serbia* (SPS – **I. Dačić**); *United Pensioners' Party of Serbia* (PUPS – **J. Krkobabić**);

**LDP:** *Liberal-democratic Party* (LDP – **Č. Jovanović**)

**List for Tolerance:** *Sanjak Democratic Party* (SDP – **R. Ljajić**) and several ethnically based parties. Instead of 5% threshold, LfT had to make the so-called „natural threshold of 3.5% of the vote.

### **Outlook:**

The outcome of the Sunday election in three Serbian municipalities represents -- despite their limited representativity and applicability to the national level -- a serious warning to the ruling coalition in Belgrade. The increasing abstention and growing support for right-wing parties remind that the political climate in a country torn by economic hardship and insufficient readiness of its political class to embark on serious reforms and deliver on its promise of Serbia's European future, will continue to be conducive to social demagoguery and further polarization in the society. As a matter of course, human rights, democratic institutions and European standards in public life are the first to fall prey to such development.

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<sup>6</sup> **Maja Gojković** was SRS Vicepresident and Mayoress of Novi Sad before she left SRS and formed her own Party 2008.