

Presidential and General Elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina

3rd October 2010

Change within the Collegial Presidency: Bakir Izetbegovic replaces outgoing President Haris Silajdzic in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The surprise came from the Bosniak community during the presidential and general elections in Bosnia Herzegovina on 3rd October.

According to incomplete results Bakir Izetbegovic (National Democratic Action Party, SDA) should be the future Bosniak President of the Collegial Presidency. The son of the first President of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1990-1996 then 1996-2000), Alija Izetbegovic, who died in 2003, won 34.80% of the vote and is running ahead of outgoing President Haris Silajdzic (Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina, SBiH) who won 24.90% of the vote and is running just third behind Fahrudin Radoncic, a businessman and owner of the biggest media group in the country (and of the Sarajevo daily Dnevni Avaz) who won 30.75% of the vote.

On the Croat side outgoing President Zeljko Komsic (Social Democratic Party, SDP) is due to be re-elected to office with 60.96% of the vote.

Within the Serb community outgoing President Nebojsa Radmanovic (Independent Social Democratic Alliance SNSD) is due to retain his seat with 49.76% of the vote, running just ahead of Mladen Ivanic (Democratic Progress Party, PDP) who is due to win 46.98% of the vote.

Turnout was very slightly higher than that recorded in the last elections on 1st October 2006 (+1.86 points) and totalled 56.30%. Doubts about electoral fraud emerged on the day of the vote amongst the Serb community with regard to the election of the Serb member of the Collegial Presidency. "A total of 13.24% of void slips in the election of the Serb member of the Collegial Presidency leads us to believe that there was possibly fraud and a detailed investigation will be undertaken with regard to this," stressed Suad Arnautovic, a member of the Central Electoral Commission of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The International High Representative, Valentin Inzko said he was satisfied with the organisation of the day of voting. He said that the smooth running of the presidential and general elections "was a sign of maturity and a good sign for democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina," adding "I hope that this will encourage change in

the country because if there is no change then elections are not necessary." He exhorted Bosnians to turn out to vote. "It is your country and your democratic responsibility to decide on its future. Do not be distracted by attitudes which divide. Concentrate on issues that concern you in your daily life such as education, employment, social services," said Valentin Inzko.

The breakthrough made by Bakir Izetbegovic is a setback for Haris Silajdzic, who has been an inevitable personality in the Bosniak community since the war. Bakir Izetbegovic said he supported dialogue with the Serbs of the Serb Republic (Republika Srpska) unlike his predecessor, who is violently opposed to any autonomy for the Serb entity (this represents 49% of the territory in Bosnia-Herzegovina). "These are the most important elections since the war. We are at a crossroads and we must choose if we want progress or continue to move dangerously towards our disappea-

rance. The time of conflict is over. We must talk now (...). The international community wants it and 90% of the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina want it too. If we cannot love each other let's try to work towards living better, that's all," declared Bakir Izetbegovic who promised to "stabilise the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and offer its citizens a better future. This means peace, better development conditions for the economy and employment," he maintained.

The leader of the Independent Social Democratic Alliance and outgoing Prime Minister of the Serb Republic, Milorad Dodik is due to be elected to the Presidency of the Republika Srpska. He won 51.90 % of the vote and is ahead of his opponent Ognjen Tadic (Serb Democratic Party, SDS) who won 36.95% of the vote. "I am happy to see that the Independent Social Democratic Alliance showed its superiority in Republika Srpska and across Bosnia Herzegovina," declared Milorad Dodik when the first results were announced. He recalled that he would continue his policy to "protect the autonomy of the Serb Republic of Bosnia." "Our motto remains Republika Srpska forever and Bosnia-Herzegovina for as long as it is necessary," he said. "Either we shall be able to come to a compromise and create balance or we shall make another choice which is that of peaceful separation, living next to one another and entertain a civilised relationship," warned Milorad Dodik.

Milorad Dodik will succeed Rajko Kuzmanovic as President of the Republika Srpska (SNSD).

Finally the Social Democratic Party won in the general elections in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and will now be the leading political force in the future Chamber of Representatives (Predstavnicki Dom), the lower Chamber of the Central Parliament (Skupstina).

The elections therefore led to a mixed result. The election of Bakir Izetbegovic to the Collegial Presidency of the Bosnia-Herzegovina is a sign of hope for the country. But the Serb nationalists emerge strengthened from these elections in the Republika Srpska as in the rest of the country. Bakir Izetbegovic will have a great deal of work if he is to bring the various communities together and make them work towards improving the country's situation.

Srecko Latal, analyst for the organisation for the prevention of international conflict – the International Crisis Group (ICG) doubts the range of Bakir Izetbegovic's appeal within the Republika Srpska. "It seems that the compromise is still seen as a weakness in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Without compromise however this country will split and I am not sure that this will not happen peacefully," he declared.

"Those who are reckoning on the continuation of the situation will undoubtedly be right. Bosnia-Herzegovina is in danger of becoming another Cyprus, a divided country, with growing autonomy on the part of the Serb Republic and a Croat-Muslim Federation that is chaotic and fragmented," maintains writer and historian Ivan Lovrenovic in an interview he granted to the French daily La Croix on 3rd October.

Fifteen years after the Dayton Agreements (signed on 14th December 1995, they put an end to the war in former Yugoslavia and established the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina between the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serb Republic of Bosnia and the deployment of an international peacekeeping force), the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina remains dark, divided and more uncertain than ever.

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