

V.I.P. Daily News Report

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Issue No. 4850

Monday, May 7, 2012

COMMENTARY

Only True Winner of Elections Is Dacic

In order to make any kind of deeper analysis of the parliamentary, presidential, provincial, and local elections held in Serbia on Sunday, it is necessary, of course, to wait for the final results, especially when it comes to the final distribution of seats in the country's 250-seat parliament.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that some conclusions cannot be extrapolated already in election night.

According to what one knows so far, the elections have produced not a single truly stunning surprise, which is probably a good thing for all concerned, but they have certainly brought some minor surprises.

Among these are certainly the parliamentary election results of the two strongest parties -- the ruling Democratic Party (DS) and the opposition Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) -- where the two parties (together with their satellites) won far fewer votes than predicted.

The DS can hardly be satisfied with its result in the parliamentary election, especially when compared to its result in the previous election, held in 2008, although truth be told, back then it contested the election in a far broader coalition than this time round.

The party has obviously paid the price of the poor results of its rule over the past period, especially in the social and economic spheres, which dissuaded many of its supporters from giving it their votes again this time.

The SNS, for its part, had hoped from the first to defeat the DS by a considerable margin, which would have improved the Progressives' chances of forming the next government.

According to the SNS's own figures, however, the party's lead is less than 4 percent (still less according to some other sources), which most analysts regard as insufficient for an SNS-led coalition government to be formed.

However, the preliminary distribution of parliamentary seats, in mathematical terms at least, leaves a lot of room for various combinations for forming the next government, so that no option should be discounted.

Much could depend on the presidential runoff, which will be held, predictably, between DS leader Boris Tadic and SNS leader Tomislav Nikolic.

It is yet to be seen which parties will support which of the two rival presidential candidates and what the price of their support will be. Consequently, predicting the outcome of the presidential runoff may now be even harder than before.

Be that as it may, the results scored by the DS and the SNS have also shown that there were no grounds for the argument, often repeated over the past year and more, that Serbia is split down the middle politically between the two dominant parties.

After all, Serbia is too complex a country for a system on the lines of the Anglo-Saxon system strongly dominated by two parties to take root here.

Nobody is happier about this than the only true winner of these elections -- the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and its leader Ivica Dacic. Dacic was the one that over the past months has been protesting the most strenuously against what has now turned out to have been a fictitious division of the country into only two political camps.

All opinion polls were predicting that the SPS would take third place in the parliamentary election and that Dacic would be third in the presidential polls, but the percentage of the vote won by the party and its chairman is even better than expected.

Predictably, this has emboldened Dacic, when addressing his loyalists in election night, to be the most explicit of all party leaders, going so far as to openly demand the post of prime minister for himself, suggesting that this would be the price of the SPS's support for either of the presidential race finalists.

One of the surprises is certainly the convincing victory of the DS-led bloc in Belgrade, where the ticket headed by incumbent Mayor Dragan Djilas far outstripped that headed by the rival SNS candidate for the post of mayor, Aleksandar Vucic.

The mayor is not elected directly, but in the City Assembly. However, it is almost certain that the parties that have held power in the Belgrade city administration so far -- apart from the DS, there have also been the SPS, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the United Regions of Serbia (URS) -- will have won enough seats in the city parliament to secure another term of office for Djilas.

Another one of those that certainly could be satisfied with the election results is Mladjan Dinkic and his URS, a broad-based coalition of local parties and movements, which crossed the threshold into the parliament despite numerous predictions to the contrary.

Practically ostracized by Tadic and never close to Nikolic, Dinkic could, if left in opposition this time, make life difficult for any government, whoever might eventually form it.

There are other more or less unexpected results, but more will be said of this over the next few days.

At present, it is enough to suppose that for a short time to come, the country will be going through a period of instability, primarily because of an extremely adverse economic situation, a precarious financial position of much of the population, and an uncertain status of an arrangement with the IMF.

Complicated negotiations about forming the next governing majority will certainly contribute to this instability. The outcome of the presidential runoff could perhaps simplify these negotiations, but it could just as well make them even more complicated.

Good news is that there will be no drama. A farce, however, is not out of the question.