

## Parliamentary elections in Serbia

Since Kosovo's parliament unilaterally proclaimed independence from Serbia on 17 February, some 38 countries have recognized its independence, while Serbia still struggles to control the province, at least in the parts that are home to Kosovo's Serb minority.

The province was under Serbian sovereignty from 1912 until the end of the Kosovo War in 1999, when the United Nations took over its administration, leaving Belgrade with little authority there.

In late 2007, the Serbian government adopted an action plan that was to be put in place after Kosovo authorities announced the province's secession. One of the key notes of the plan was the strengthening of links with Serbs living in the northern Kosovo enclaves by taking back the authority they lost there in 1999.

There is no doubt that Kosovo is going to be the key focus in the Serbian elections set for 11 May, since the province's declaration of independence led to the collapse of the Serbian government in mid-March. This is also due to the growing divide between Serbian President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS), on the one side, and Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and the Radical Party, on the other side, over the country's EU membership plans. Even though neither side is willing to give up on Kosovo, Tadic says that Serbia's place is in the EU and that only through EU membership could Serbia win Kosovo back, while Kostunica refuses any EU reforms until Kosovo is part of Serbia.

The latest opinion polls indicate that this time around, thanks largely to Kosovo's independence declaration, we will see far greater polarization amongst Serbian voters.

The smaller parties that deprived the larger parties of votes in early 2007 could be close to out of the game, but the jury is still out on whether voters will choose the European path put forward by the DS and G17 Plus or the hardline position put forward by the DSS and the Radicals. A February poll showed that the DS and Radicals would make gains over the last elections, while the DSS stands to lose votes. Kostunica already has discussed the possibility of forming a coalition with the Radicals.

As proof that the Serbian authorities - regardless of their political party - are keen to keep Kosovo under their rule, and as such have expressed intentions of holding elections across the whole territory of Kosovo to send the message that the province still remains part of Serbia.

UN Security Council member and Serbian ally Russia, which vetoed all UN attempts to grant Kosovo independence, said that the Serb population had the right to elect their representatives at the local and national levels.

Serbian President Tadic has likewise said that the citizens of Kosovo who recognize the Republic of Serbia as their state have the right to elect their municipal and parliamentary representatives. However, the move was rejected by Kosovo officials and UN authorities who say they are the only ones who can organize elections in Kosovo.

The current UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is set to be replaced by an EU-led one in June, which would concentrate on the fields of police, the judiciary and customs. The 2,000-strong EULEX force has a mandate to monitor and provide advice to local institutions in the field of the rule of law.

However, the Serbian government and the Kosovo Serbs have rejected the possibility of cooperation with EULEX, as its deployment is taking place without a UN Security Council decision. Serbia insists on dealing only with UNMIK, the mandate of which recognizes the territorial integrity of Serbia.

In the meantime, mass media, from the start of the war in Kosovo, has remained clearly divided between East and West. Mass media in the West was quick to jump on the Kosovo bandwagon, and its readers tend to understand Kosovo's independence as a given. Elsewhere, independence for Kosovo is seen as a dangerous precedent. There have been few, if any, intelligent works published in the mainstream media examining the legal legitimacy of an independent Kosovo or its economic viability as a nation.

Anes Alic

ISN Security Watch senior correspondent in Southeastern Europe and Executive Director of ISA Consulting

## **1.1 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

This is the official website of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The website offers news, reports and general information resources on Kosovo. This site is also available in French, Russian and Spanish.

EU in Kosovo, by the European Union, Brussels, Belgium

This website provides information on the fourth pillar of UNMIK, the "EU pillar". The pillar is funded by the European Commission and supports the economic development of Kosovo in line with its European perspective.

European Union Planning Team for Kosovo (EUPT Kosovo)

This website offers information about the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo - "EULEX Kosovo". The mission's aim is to support the Kosovo authorities in their efforts to build a sustainable and functional rule of law system.

## **1.2 GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade

This is the official website of the Serbian government. It offers information and the latest news on the Serbian government, politics, economy, corruption, culture and religion, and sports. It also provides information and documents on Kosovo and EU integration.

Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)

This is the official website of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS). Available only in Serbian.

Democratic Party (DS)

This is the website of the Democratic Party (DS). Available only in Serbian.

Republic of Kosovo – Assembly, Pristina

The official website of the Assembly of Kosovo, the legislative body of Kosovo, provides information on the work of its president, committees and parliamentary groups. It also makes available important declarations, resolutions and regulations.

## **1.3 RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA**

The Centre for South East European Studies, Sofia, Bulgaria

The center focuses on security and defense aspects of South East Europe. It seeks to stimulate debate in the professional defense and security communities of the region on the security challenges of the 21st century and to make recommendations on what measures need be adopted to achieve real and positive changes for the general good. The website provides a news section, analyses and reports, and offers a monthly newsletter on defense and security.

Russian Analytical Digest No. 39: Russian-Serbian Relations, by the Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Switzerland and the Forschungsstelle Osteuropa (FSOE), Germany

This issue of the Russian Analytical Digest examines Russian-Serbian relations. First, it draws attention to the history of relations since 1948 and then considers the political direction of Serbia after Kosovo's independence. Further, it looks at the self-declared country's impact on Russia and discusses US-Russian disagreement over the matter. This issue also includes a Russian popular opinion poll concerning Kosovo.

## **1.4 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Will the Real Serbia Please Stand Up? by the International Crisis Group, Brussels, Belgium

This Crisis Group report assesses the situation prior to the Serbian parliamentary and local elections. It argues that the elections are unlikely to change the basic policy towards Kosovo, even in the event that a pro-Western government comes to power.

## **1.5 MEDIA**

Serbian legislative elections, by NewsTin, Prague, Czech Republic

This website provides news reports and articles about the Serbian legislative elections. NewsTin is a global social news platform that aggregates news articles in various languages and from a wide range of media sources.