

**BOSNIA'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2000:  
WINNERS AND LOSERS**

27 April 2000

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## **BOSNIA'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2000: WINNERS AND LOSERS**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The international community can draw a degree of comfort from the results of Bosnia's 8 April 2000 municipal elections. Overall, the voting was free of violence and more free and fair than any previous election held in Bosnia. Nationalism may not be on the run yet—witness the strength of indicted Bosnian Serb war criminal Radovan Karadzic's Serbian Democratic Party (SDS)—but moderate leaders are making inroads and increasing numbers of voters seem to be paying attention to their messages.

In Bosniak areas support shifted from the ruling Party of Democratic Action (SDA) to Haris Silajdzic's Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH) and Zlatko Lagumdzija's moderate Social Democratic Party (SDP). As a result, Silajdzic positioned himself as king-maker in numerous Bosniak majority municipalities, and as heir apparent to the ageing Alija Izetbegovic among the Bosniak electorate.

In Republika Srpska (RS) the victory of the nationalist hard-line Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in 49 of 61 municipalities is troubling, given the newly passed RS law on local self-management which significantly weakened the RS central government and transferred sweeping powers to the municipalities. On the other hand, the surprising showing of Mladen Ivanic's Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) signals that the politically moderate Ivanic is becoming the most popular Bosnian Serb politician and is well placed to become the next prime minister of Republika Srpska.

In western Herzegovina a startling drop in voter turnout among the Croat electorate indicated displeasure with the ruling ultra-nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). This, however, did not diminish the HDZ sweep of all Croat-majority municipalities. The emergence of Bosnian Croat moderates, made possible in theory by the success of the democratic forces in this year's Croatian elections, was aborted by the OSCE's refusal to postpone its electoral timetable.

The emergence of an ever-increasing democratic alternative, both in the Bosniak areas of the Federation and Republika Srpska, is encouraging and must be nurtured. The international community can take comfort in the electoral support accorded to those parties that represent a democratic alternative to nationalism. Given time and the proper influences, these parties will gain a stronger foothold and eventually break the nationalist stranglehold on Bosnian political life, if the international community demonstrates the resolve to stay the course. Yet, the international community must not

lose sight of the fact that for the next four years, the nationalists will still control the majority of Bosnia's municipalities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The European Union and U.S. should reallocate support to municipalities that have elected moderate leaders.
2. The European Union and U.S. should encourage those moderate Croat politicians within the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) to break from the party.
3. The High Representative and OSCE should ensure that all newly elected officials are in full compliance with the property law and not illegally residing in a displaced person's home.
4. The Office of the High Representative should review the existing cantonal legislation and constitutions, which limit the powers of the municipalities.
5. Organisations that deal with civil society and democratisation programmes should concentrate on assisting Bosnia's more progressive political parties in bridging the rural/urban gap among the electorate.

**Sarajevo/Washington/Brussels, 27 April 2000**



## BOSNIA'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2000: WINNERS AND LOSERS

### I. PRELUDE TO THE ELECTIONS

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), under its mandate given by Annex III of the Dayton Peace Agreement, organised and financed the municipal elections held on 8 April 2000. The integrity of the elections was to be guaranteed by the presence of 6,600 local and international observers.<sup>1</sup> The elections were held under the Provisional Election Commission (PEC) Rules and Regulations, which included a number of new provisions from the draft election law the Bosnian parliament failed to pass earlier in the year. This included such relative innovations as an open list system and new rules governing the eligibility of candidates. The most significant:

- the Rule on Incompatibility Applicable to Financial, Court and Border Service,<sup>2</sup> which forbade office holders from sitting on the board of directors of public companies;
- PEC Rule 7.16, which forbade the candidacy of persons illegally occupying apartments or homes belonging to refugees and displaced persons.

In keeping with these rules, the OSCE removed a number of candidates from the ballot. In the aftermath of the elections the OSCE has continued to aggressively remove those found in violation of these rules.

Prior to the elections, the OSCE banned the Bosnian Serb branch of Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS) from fielding candidates in Republika Srpska (RS). This was in part intended by the High Representative and OSCE to help persuade the Bosnian Serb electorate that it was futile to continue supporting politicians who openly opposed the Dayton peace process.

The OSCE also launched an intense media campaign, featuring the slogan "*Vote For Change.*" Local media had to follow strict rules for covering parties' pre-election campaigns, and political parties were put on notice that ultra-nationalist or provocative rhetoric could cause them to be banned from the elections or lose seats. As a result, the political campaign was considerably toned down in comparison with previous years. In the few instances where belligerent or

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE press release, Sarajevo, 6 April 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Article 7.15 PEC Rules and Regulations.

nationalist rhetoric was used, immediate condemnation and strong warnings followed from both OSCE and the OHR.

#### **A. Influences on the Election**

The international community hoped that the Croatian elections would positively influence events in Bosnia. In retrospect it appears that the Croatian elections did have an impact in Bosnia, but not in the way the international community hoped. Croatia's elections appeared to have encouraged hesitant Bosniak voters in the Federation, who felt that they now had a real chance to oust the Party of Democratic Action (SDA). The effects on Bosnia's Croats, however, seem to have been largely negative. Lacking the comfort of a protector in Zagreb, and facing hostile Croatian government inquiries into the financing of Herzeg-Bosna, the Bosnian Croats had little choice but to stay home—which significant numbers did—or close ranks once more and vote for the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which most Croats did.

The OSCE had closed registration lists in late 1999, prior to the electoral victories of the anti-Tudjman/HDZ forces in Croatia. In spite of much pressure to postpone the elections, the OSCE refused. As a result, potentially moderate Croat politicians in Bosnia remained within the HDZ fold, unable to field their own candidates' lists. This made it difficult for Croat moderates seeking to align themselves with the new forces in Croatia to capitalise in Bosnian elections.

Several events occurred in the RS and Croat majority areas of the Federation immediately prior to the election which held the potential to influence the election outcomes. In RS the most evident were the arrest of the Serbian Democratic Party's (SDS) Momcilo Krajsnik five days before the elections, and Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's champagne antics at the championship basketball game in Banja Luka. A former Bosnian presidency member and close Karadzic associate, Krajsnik was the highest ranking Bosnian Serb arrested to date for war crimes, and his capture raised the possibility of a Serb nationalist backlash. Dodik's on-camera champagne-spraying antics followed his basketball team's victory. So too did the on-camera antics of his bodyguards, who raced into the stands and began beating members of the opposing team's fan club. By so doing, Dodik risked alienating the more moderate urban Serbs in Banja Luka and northern RS. For the Croats, the removal of the ultra-radical Croat Demo-Christian party head Petar Milic from the Federation parliament and party leadership, was followed shortly by the removal of Ante Barisic as Minister of Internal Affairs in Canton 10. Both individuals had advocated an ultra-nationalist policy, and had worked actively towards such an end. These removals could have become rallying points for Croat nationalism. In spite of all these incidents, it appears none changed substantially the way people voted.

## **II. WHAT DO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MEAN?**

Given the complex constitutional structure of Bosnia and its entities, a municipality has a varying degree of power, responsibility and jurisdiction,

depending on which ethnic group holds a majority. In essence, the municipal administration in Bosnia functions in three separate entity-based systems.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of the 8 April 2000 elections arises from the four-year terms for the elected Municipal Councils and Assemblies.<sup>4</sup> The Councils and Assemblies will be formed on the principle of proportional representation, similar to a parliament.<sup>5</sup> And the party or coalition of parties that is able to form a majority on the municipal council controls the municipal executive functions. Election results show that in numerous municipalities no party received an absolute majority of votes. As a result, in many municipalities parties will be forced to form governing coalitions — similar to a parliament — in order to form municipal governing bodies.

## **A. Republika Srpska**

In the RS, municipalities are very powerful, and embody the principle of local self-government.<sup>6</sup> Two main bodies in the municipal government are the Municipal Assembly and the Assembly's Executive Board. The most powerful positions are in the hands of the President of the Executive Board of the Municipal Assembly, and the President of the Assembly, while the Secretary of the Assembly (executive officer) acts in a more subservient role.<sup>7</sup> Individuals appointed to those positions usually come from the winning party and their appointments result from inter-party negotiations and distribution of power. A new RS law on self-management of municipalities that took effect on 8 April 2000, significantly strengthened the already strong RS municipalities.<sup>8</sup>

## **B. Bosniak Municipalities**

In the Federation the administrative structure is far more complicated than in the RS, as it consists of three levels: federation, cantonal and municipal.<sup>9</sup> Power in a Federation municipality is in theory concentrated with the Mayor, who appoints a "Mayor's Cabinet" without necessarily seeking the approval of the Municipal Council. The executive position of mayor is chosen by the party or coalition with an absolute majority.

Due to the principle of decentralisation endorsed by the Federation Constitution, cantons have broad and significant responsibility and powers. Although municipalities are guaranteed self-rule in local matters,<sup>10</sup> they are often heavily

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<sup>3</sup> This *de facto* three-entity system is discussed in the ICG paper *Is Dayton Failing? Bosnia Four Years After the Peace Agreement*, ICG Balkan report No. 80, 28 October 1999, pp.23-34, 55-64.

<sup>4</sup> OSCE press release, 23 March 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Article 6.5 PEC Rules and Regulations.

<sup>6</sup> Zakon o teritorijalnoj organizaciji i lokalnoj samoupravi, Sluzbeni glasnik RS 11/94.

<sup>7</sup> See ICG report *Rule of Law in Public Administration: Confusion and Discrimination in a Post-Communist Bureaucracy*, Bosnia Legal Project Report No 2, ICG Balkan Reports No 84, Sarajevo, 15 December 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Zakon o lokalnoj samo-upravi, Sluzbene Novine Republike Srpska, 35/99.

<sup>9</sup> Zakon o upravi Federacije BiH, Sluzbene Novine Federacije BiH, 28/97.

<sup>10</sup> See ICG report *Rule of Law in Public Administration: Confusion and Discrimination in a Post-Communist Bureaucracy*, Bosnia Legal Project Report No 2, ICG Balkan Reports No 84, Sarajevo, 15 December 1999.



dependent on financial support from the cantons. In fact, cantons typically take 80 per cent of all tax revenues collected from any municipality, while leaving only 20 per cent to the municipal authorities. In some areas this ratio may vary, depending on the needs of the municipality. As a result, Bosniak majority municipalities have far less power than their counterparts in the RS and are often heavily reliant on the canton for financing. This means that almost all financial control in the Bosniak majority regions of the Federation is exercised at the cantonal level.

As a result, this balance of power is a disadvantage for parties such as the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which win on the municipal level, but do not control the canton. As seen in the SDP-controlled Tuzla municipality, after the 1997 municipal elections, Tuzla's SDA cantonal authorities used their power to block or overturn any progressive changes, and abrogated almost all financial and budgetary responsibility from the SDP-controlled municipality to the SDA-controlled canton. In the aftermath of the 8 April elections, it would not be surprising to see a similar pattern repeat itself in other SDP-controlled municipalities. Cantonal control and manipulation of municipal finances would be done for purely political reasons, so as to make the party controlling the municipality look bad in future elections.

### **C. Croat Municipalities**

In contrast to Bosniak municipalities, in the mixed cantons and in those cantons with a Croat majority, cantonal authority is more problematic. In such conditions, many municipalities saw the rise of local warlords and war-time political structures (Herzeg-Bosna) that showed complete disregard for the rule of law. The continued existence of the illegal parallel Herzeg-Bosna institutions further complicates the situation and the legitimacy of municipal and cantonal governing bodies. A good example of this is Canton 10.<sup>11</sup> In any event, municipal structures in Croat majority areas typically wield more power than their Bosniak counterparts, yet their political allegiance is to the Herzeg-Bosna institutions, and not to the canton.

## **III. ELECTION DAY**

There is no evidence to dispute the judgement of OSCE Head of Mission Robert Barry and High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch that "Municipal elections in BiH were free and fair." Approximately 70 per cent of the electorate appeared to have cast their vote in 145 municipalities, a relatively high turnout. Unlike previous years, election day passed without any major incidents.

This year, the only shortcoming was the problem with voter registration lists, as many voters were unable to find their polling station. The mix-up occurred because OSCE wanted the elections to last only one day, as compared to the

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<sup>11</sup> Joint OHR, OSCE, UNMiBH, UNHCR, EU press release, "The situation in Canton 10, Mostar", 23 March 2000.

previous practice of two. As a result, 1,000 new polling stations had to be opened to accommodate voters. This resulted in misinformation as to which polling station voters were to use.<sup>12</sup> OSCE emphasised that those problems were encountered, not due to incomplete voter registers, as in previous years, but rather, due to the re-assignment of voters to different polling stations.<sup>13</sup> This caused an increase in the number of votes cast on unconfirmed ballots. Due to the confusion, OSCE kept polling stations open an extra hour. In its defence, OSCE had made the registers available for public scrutiny three weeks before the elections.<sup>14</sup>

Although some polling stations ran out of ballots, and the incompetence of some local election boards caused frustration and anger among the voters, these problems did not appear to affect either the regularity or the integrity of the elections.<sup>15</sup> The few random incidents that occurred did not appear to jeopardise the elections.

#### **IV. WINNERS AND LOSERS**

The preliminary results revealed some changes. Unfortunately, as in years past, those changes must be differentiated along ethnic lines.

##### **A. The Bosniaks**

###### **1. The SDP Victories Mean Little – For Now**

Although the Social Democratic Party (SDP) victories signalled a long awaited and welcome change in the way the Bosnian electorate thinks and votes, its victories were limited to Bosniak majority areas, where they won relative or absolute majorities in 15 municipalities. The SDP's gains are likely to have little effect on the day to day life of the average Bosnian, or on relations between the international community and the Bosnian government. That is because in the Bosniak majority areas of the Federation, the real power lies with the cantonal level — as discussed above. As seen in the aftermath of the 1997 municipal elections — where the SDP won in Tuzla — the SDA controlled Tuzla-Podrina Canton simply removed most financial control and political power from the Tuzla municipality. A similar scenario could likely play out in the Sarajevo and Zenica Cantons, where the SDP appears to have gained either absolute or relative majorities in a large number of municipalities. In the Tuzla-Podrina Canton, where the SDP picked up numerous municipalities, this has already occurred.

The SDP, moreover, may not control as many municipalities as it appears. Although the party won a relative majority in a number of municipalities, it may have to contend with an SDA/SBiH coalition.

The challenge for the SDP is to translate its victories at the municipal level into solid gains in the fall, when general elections will effect the real sources of power.

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<sup>12</sup> *Oslobodjenje*, 4 April 2000.

<sup>13</sup> "Voter Registries Not to Blame for Misdirected Voters", OSCE press release, 8 April 2000, Sarajevo.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Oslobodjenje*, 9 April 2000, and 10 April 2000.

In the words of Miro Lazovic, the President of the SDP Sarajevo Cantonal Board: "The effects of this success will be entirely superficial unless SDP wins in Sarajevo Canton in the coming general elections." In trying to bring this about, the SDP cannot ignore the fact that in the vast majority of Bosniak majority municipalities, a significant percentage of the electorate voted for Bosniak-oriented parties (SBiH and SDA).

## 2. The Rural/Urban Split

In the course of the elections it became evident that — in the Bosniak majority regions — a major split exists between the rural and urban areas. In rural areas the nationalist-oriented parties proved most popular, with the SDA and SBiH gaining the majority of votes. In the major cities — Sarajevo, Zenica and Tuzla — liberal-oriented parties did much better, as seen in SDP's strong performance in these areas. In the municipality of Visoko the progressive Liberal Civic Coalition (LGK) captured the precincts in the town's centre, while the SDA and SBiH took the rural precincts. A similar phenomenon occurred in Kakanj, where the SDP showed strongly in the city centre, while the SDA and SBiH did well in the rural precincts.

International community support for the SDP no doubt played a major role. Yet, among some members of the rural electorate, the high level of international support given to the SDP has raised questions about the party's commitment to the Bosniak cause.

## 3. The Real Bosniak Winner: Haris Silajdzic

The big winner in the elections was not the SDP, which has yet to translate its victory into meaningful results. Rather, the real victor in the Bosniak controlled areas appears to have been Haris Silajdzic and the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH). A western-oriented political moderate and a firm believer in a unified Bosnian state, Silajdzic has nonetheless proven unable to widen his appeal beyond Bosniak voters. Although the SBiH won only one municipality, its strong showing in a number of other municipalities demonstrated the SDA's increasing weakness. In the battle to succeed the ageing Alija Izetbegovic, Silajdzic has proven to be far and away the most popular Bosniak politician, second only to Izetbegovic himself, and he has demonstrated that the SDA no longer has the exclusive right to represent the Bosniak electorate. Silajdzic's victory was made possible by the defection of substantial portions of the Bosniak electorate from the SDA to SBiH, which they viewed as a viable Bosniak nationalist alternative.

Given the large number of Bosniak municipalities where no one party won an absolute majority, the elections place Silajdzic firmly in the drivers seat as a king-maker between the SDP and the SDA. In a number of key municipalities, the SDA will have to rely on the SBiH if it wishes to maintain control. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in Sarajevo's Stari Grad (old town) municipality, where the SDP won 36 per cent, the SBiH 32 per cent, and the SDA 21 per cent. Control over this municipality now rest entirely in the hands of the SBiH, which must decide whether to go into coalition with the SDP or the SDA.

The election results also reveal the weakness and unpopularity of the Bicakcic-led wing of the SDA. Silajdzic is now firmly placed to wrest the Bosniak nationalist portfolio from the SDA, perhaps even with Izetbegovic's blessing. SDA officials have recognised this, as reflected in the current wave of house-cleaning, which includes Bicakcic's resignation and calls for the resignation of other key SDA officials.

As the SDA unravels, caused in large part by popular perceptions of corruption, many Bosniak voters are seeking an option that will protect Bosniak rights while halting the party's corrupt practices. A similar phenomenon occurred in Republika Srpska in 1997 and 1998, when voters distanced themselves from the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). The majority of these Serb voters, rather than choose a more moderate party, simply shifted their allegiance to other nationalist parties, namely Biljana Plavsic's Serbian National Party (SNS) and Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Perhaps a similar phenomenon is occurring among certain segments of the Bosniak electorate.

## **B. The Croats**

### **1. Low Voter Turnout: HDZ Victory**

The elections in those parts of the Federation with Croat majorities were characterised by a relatively low voter turnout. This trend was most dramatic in the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) Herzegovina heartland municipalities of Canton 8 and in some of the municipalities of Canton 7. In Ljubuski, Siroki Brijeg, Grude, Posusje, and Neum the HDZ captured a decisive majority of the vote, but with voter turnout 44 per cent to 53 per cent lower than in 1997. In Citluk and Capljina where the HDZ received over 80 per cent of the vote, turnout was down by about 30 per cent from 1997. This figure refers only to votes cast within the municipalities. Since all of these municipalities currently contain large Croat majorities, this figure reflects with some accuracy the turnout of Croat voters.

In the municipalities of Canton 8, the only opposition parties to earn a significant portion of the vote were the Croatian Christian Democratic Union (HKDU), with about 20 per cent of the vote in Grude and Posusje, and the Croat Christian Homeland Rebirth Party, with over 20 per cent of the vote in Ljubuski.

This may indicate several things. First, the Croats are tired of voting, having voted three times in Croatian parliamentary and presidential elections since December 1999. Second, voter confusion and apathy could have played a role, as could disgust with local HDZ politicians. Third, there was no way to register support for new moderate directions within the Bosnian Croat community following the victory of the democratic forces in Croatia, other than by staying home. In any event, western Herzegovina suffered from a surprisingly low voter turnout.

These statistics suggest that while perhaps many Croat voters in the traditional HDZ heartland of Herzegovina are fed up with the HDZ, they do not see a viable political alternative or simply do not believe that their vote will make a difference.

The fact that the only significant opposition in these areas also supports a nationalist ideology is noteworthy. Nonetheless, current internal house-cleaning within the HDZ suggests that — for the time being — moderate elements within the party have been able to use the election results to make key personnel changes, particularly in Mostar.

Nonetheless, the HDZ predictably gained an absolute majority in all Croat majority municipalities in Bosnia, with the exception of Zepce, where it boycotted the elections, and Glamoc, where, in the face of strong Bosniak absentee voting, it won only a plurality. Nonetheless, the HDZ is once again firmly in the driver's seat among Bosnia's Croats for the next four years. The only remaining question is whether Croatia's changing political scene will influence the HDZ to moderate its hard-line tone.

## 2. The Problem of Zepce

The election results in the ethnically divided municipality of Zepce will quite likely cause serious problems for the international community. Although the municipality — long the subject of reunification talks — is roughly half Croat and half Bosniak, the HDZ boycott resulted in the SDA taking nearly 98 per cent of the vote. The Croats in Zepce also boycotted the 1997 municipal elections, only to have the OSCE award them seats on the municipal council. This year the OSCE has already indicated it will not reward HDZ misbehaviour by altering the election results in Zepce.<sup>16</sup> The Croats boycotted the elections to express their dissatisfaction with the current status and structure of those municipalities, but now, without representation in the local government, their aims will be even more distant.

Attempts to implement the election results could be opposed by local Croats, who control the town centre. This might lead to violent confrontation between Croats, Bosniaks and international officials, as the Croats could well refuse to seat newly elected officials, or to honour their decisions. Although the Croats also boycotted the election in Gornji Vakuf, repercussions in that municipality should not be as severe as in Zepce.

## C. The Serbs

### 1. The Re-emergence of the SDS

The election results in Republika Srpska came as no surprise to international observers. Neither did the extent of the Serbian Democratic Party's (SDS) victories. The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's pre-election basketball antics, the protracted Kosovo crisis and its threat to minority Serbs, and the banning of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) guaranteed the SDS would turn in a solid showing. The new law on local government guarantees that the RS municipal elections will cause Dodik's central government to lose much of

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<sup>16</sup> *Oslobodjenje*, 11 April 2000.

its control over municipal-level affairs. The result could well be increased obstruction to refugee returns throughout the SDS-controlled areas of the RS. Although of late the SDS has attempted to portray itself as a kinder, gentler party, and has distanced itself publicly from Radovan Karadzic, there is no reason to think the leopard has changed its spots.

RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik has contested this interpretation, asserting that "the wrong impression, that the SDS is a winner in the municipal elections is being created in the public."<sup>17</sup> He emphasised that SDS got their votes from supporters of the banned SRS, and that in general the number of votes for the SDS is much lower than in previous elections.

Nonetheless, the SDS victories in 49 of 61, as well as strong showings in several as of yet undecided municipalities, may give renewed strength to both Bosniak and Croat nationalist parties in the upcoming autumn elections and spell the beginning of the end of Dodik's mandate as prime minister.

## 2. The Weakening of Dodik and Plavsic

Prime Minister Dodik claimed the elections were a significant victory for his party, the Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). In one sense they were, in that the SNSD, which had previously limited its appeal on the municipal level only to Dodik's home municipality of Laktasi, now gained a larger following, eventually claiming victory in four municipalities. In spite of this, Dodik's weakness became apparent in light of the surprisingly strong showing of Mladen Ivanic's Party of Democratic Progress (PDP).

If these municipal elections foreshadow fall election results, Dodik may be in serious political trouble. It appears that although the SNSD increased the number of municipalities it controls from one to four, its relative weakness in relation to the SDS is likely to continue in the fall's general elections. In these elections, Dodik's SLOGA coalition could crumble in the face of an RS parliament in which the SDS comprises more than 50 per cent of the delegates. In this scenario, Dodik's tenure as Prime Minister would come to an abrupt end.

Biljana Plavsic's SNS fared extremely poorly, winning only three municipalities. If this election is an accurate barometer of public attitudes, the SNS may well have lost any future role as a serious political force in RS.

## 3. The Heir Apparent: Mladen Ivanic and a Democratic Alternative

The big surprise in RS was the strong showing of Mladen Ivanic's newly-formed Party for Democratic Progress (PDP), which in some municipalities took second place to the SDS ahead of Dodik's SNSD. Like Haris Silajdzic, Ivanic will play the role of king-maker in several key RS municipalities. The election suggests that Ivanic is becoming the most popular politician in RS today. This could well position Ivanic — who is acceptable both to the international community and the SDS — to replace Dodik as Prime Minister, or to hold one of several other prominent positions, including the Presidency of RS, Presiding Minister in the Council of Ministers, or perhaps to replace Zivko Radisic in the national

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<sup>17</sup> *Dnevni Avaz*, 12 April 2000.

presidency. So too, many moderate RS voters may chose to link their futures to Ivanic's ascendant star.

Nonetheless, it must be remembered that, in spite of the seemingly non-nationalist orientation of his party, Ivanic is separated from Dodik by a wide gulf of seemingly personal animosity, which may well render the two unable to work together or form effective coalitions in key municipalities. This may cause Ivanic to go into coalition with the SDS. So too, Ivanic's close ties with the SDS and Belgrade could prove troublesome for international community efforts.

The encouraging news in RS is the growth of an alternative to hard-line nationalist parties, such as the SDS and SRS. This is seen in the relatively strong showing, when seen as a combination, of Dodik's SNSD with Ivanic's PDP. This demonstrates that the number of nationalist-minded voters in RS is steadily decreasing. It also shows that an increasingly significant portion of the RS electorate is looking for alternatives that address their economic, social and political concerns. This ever-growing segment of the electorate represents a glimmer of hope for the RS.

## **CONCLUSION**

The municipal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina passed largely without incident. Voting was fair, and for the first time the OSCE carried out its duties competently and properly. Election results proved both encouraging and disappointing. The encouraging news is the rise of a genuine democratic, non-nationalist alternative among both the Bosniaks and Serbs, as seen in polling results for the SDP, SNSD, and PDP. So too, the dramatic fall in voter turnout in the more radical HDZ-controlled regions signals that perhaps the Croat electorate is beginning to rethink its options.

More disappointing were the renewed victories for the nationalist parties: the HDZ maintained its grip on power, while the SDS reaffirmed itself as the nationalist party of choice for Serbs. The SDA, although suffering significant losses to its rival nationalist SBiH, also managed to retain control of the majority of Bosniak municipalities. The SDS victory may strengthen the nationalist Bosniak parities (SDA/SBiH) in the upcoming fall elections.

For the SDP, the disappointing news is that the municipal level of government remains at the mercy of the SDA-controlled Cantons. Therefore, the SDP win is little more than a symbolic morale booster for the upcoming fall elections.

Among the Bosniaks the rise of the SDP as a non-nationalist alternative to the SDA, also coincided with a rise in the popularity of Haris Silajdzic's SBiH, as a nationalist alternative to the corrupt SDA. Given his victories, Silajdzic appears to have positioned himself as Alija Izetbegovic's heir apparent among Bosniaks.

In Republika Srpska the surprising showing of Mladen Ivanic's PDP signals that Ivanic is becoming the most popular Serb politician. This, combined with Dodik's

loss of momentum by comparison, could mean that Ivanic is placed to rise rapidly to high office in Republika Srpska.

The emergence of an ever-increasing democratic alternative, both in the Bosniak areas of the Federation and Republika Srpska is encouraging and must be nurtured. Given time, these voters will increase. The international community can take comfort in the electoral support accorded to those parties that represent a democratic alternative to nationalism. Given the proper influences, these parties will gain a stronger foothold and eventually break the nationalist stranglehold on Bosnian political life. Yet, it must not lose sight of the fact that for the next four years, the nationalist will still control Bosnia's municipalities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The key in Bosnian politics is to build democratic alternatives to the nationalist poison. Viable democratic alternatives are now emerging and gaining real strength at the ballot box. These can be supported if:

1. The international donor nations and institutions should reallocate financial support to municipalities whose newly elected-leadership demonstrates moderation and progress in achieving core Dayton objectives, especially refugee return. Strict conditionality must apply.
2. The European Union and U.S. should encourage those moderate Croat politicians within the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) to break from the party prior to the fall general elections. This could include additional OSCE and National Democratic Institute (NDI) logistical and financial support for election campaigns, as well as training programs.
3. In compliance with PEC rule 7.16 and the Rule of Incompatibility Applicable to Financial, Court and Border Service, the High Representative and OSCE should ensure that all newly elected officials are in full compliance with property laws and not illegally possessing a displaced person's home. This will establish the principle that elected officials must abide by the law, and will also facilitate refugees returns.
4. The Office of the High Representative should review the existing cantonal legislation and constitutions, which limit the powers of the municipalities. Reforming cantonal constitutions and legislation that limits the power of the municipalities will enable the international community and the Bosnian electorate to hold public officials accountable for their actions.
5. Organisations that deal with civil society and democratisation programs should concentrate on assisting Bosnia's more progressive political parties in bridging the rural/urban gap among the electorate. This could focus on education and outreach efforts in those rural areas demonstrating the highest degree of loyalty to nationalist parties.