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Serbian parliamentary election: who won?

On 24th of April 2016 the parliamentary elections were held in Serbia for the third time in less than four years; indeed, despite the fact that were formerly scheduled for the March 2018, in the last January the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić decided to hasten the elections in order to renew the National Assembly of Serbia (Narodna Skupština Republike Srbije). PM Vučić officially called the vote early with the aim of strengthen the position of his government because: “Serbia needs four more years of stability so that it is ready to join the European Union”. At the same time he was probably fully convinced that, thanks to the fragmentation of the oppositions, his party and his majority could exclusively take advantage of an anticipated parliamentary poll.

The outcome of the elections has supported PM Vučić’s intentions only partially. Since the Serbian Progressive Party-led (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) coalition obtained the 48,25% of the suffrages, it gained an overwhelming majority in the Parliament with 131 seats out of the total 250. These results will probably allow the actual ruling party to keep its leading role and support Vučić’s government for the next four years.

As expected, the oppositions appeared to be deeply divided and incapable to offer a credible political alternative against the running coalition, even more in a country where the importance of appearing a “strong leader” remains crucial. On the other hand, the SNS incurred heavy losses in comparison with the outcome of the previous elections held in 2014 (-1,1% votes and -27 seats), and the same happened at his main allied, the Socialist Party of Serbia led by the actual Minister of Foreign Affairs and former prime minister Ivica Dačić.

The losses of these two parties is mainly due to the electoral success of three political forces that were out of the parliament until now and that succeeded to go beyond the 5% threshold:

- the DSS-Dveri (Demokratska Stranka Srbije, DSS - 13 seats),
- the It’s Enough - Restart movement (Dosta Je Bilo – Restart, DJB - 16 seats),
- and the Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka, SRS - 22 seats) led by Vojislav Seselj (recently acquitted of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia).

Even if these three forces will oppose Vučić's government, they are placed at the opposites ends of the political spectrum. Nonetheless the 2016 elections turned out to be more than just a mere strengthening of Vučić's political position, and in the future they can even become a backfire for the actual majority. Therefore, while Vučić and the SNS can be satisfied of the results of the elections since it will probably reinforce their leading position in the Serbian political arena in the short term, the success of new political forces of opposition could represent a threat for their supremacy in the long term.

The elections held in Serbia have important consequences both at regional and international level, even more since many international observers depicted them as a referendum on the process of accession to the European Union.

PM Vučić, despite his role in Milošević's government (he served as Minister of Information from 1998 to 2000), is considered in Brussels as the only stable pro-European partner in Serbia, especially thanks to his economic reforms and his commitment in the normalization of the relations with Kosovo. As a matter of fact, the perspective of a Serbian accession to the European Union in the short term remains unrealistic, but PM Vučić has demonstrated to know how exploit any political resource in order to keep his power.