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Internal Report

Update Related to Upcoming Serbia Elections in Kosovo

On 13 March, the Speaker of the Serbian parliament Slavica Đukić-Dejanović announced local and central elections in Serbia for the 6 May, including the territory of Kosovo. Subsequently, on 5 April the President of Serbia, Boris Tadić, resigned from his position ten months ahead of the expiry of his mandate and new Presidential elections were called for the same date.

Serbian local elections were not held in Kosovo between 1999 and 2008. Serbia organized local elections for the territory of Kosovo in 2008, and extraordinary elections in Leposavić (2009) and in Mitrovica and Novo Brdo (2010). However, neither of the results were recognized by UNMIK, although local government structures were formed based on these results (parallel municipalities). This time, Serbia faces growing pressure from the international community not to hold elections in Kosovo, especially in light of the ongoing EU integration process. Following the negative response from UNMIK SG Farid Zarif on the support to Serbia with regard to the organization of local elections, the Serb Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanović on the 15th of April stated that the elections in Kosovo will not be held because the authorities in Belgrade "do not wish to violate (UNSC) Resolution 1244 in any way", or "endanger those Serbs who live (in enclaves) south of the Ibar River". In addition to this, the State Secretary in the Ministry for Kosovo Oliver Ivanović stated that even if elections were to be organized in some municipalities, their results will not be recognized by Serbia. Instead, Belgrade proposes to form municipal councils or extend the mandates of local self-governments (parallel municipalities).

On the other hand, four years after independence the Kosovo Government has come under much pressure from the opposition parties not to allow the organization of elections of Serbia in Kosovo and to stop the operation of parallel municipalities. The Kosovo government has acted swiftly to prohibit this, at least in the rest of Kosovo. It has recently arrested key figures of Serbia parallel institutions operating in the rest of Kosovo. In the course of the last month, the Kosovar authorities arrested nine Serbs for allegedly transporting election materials into Kosovo. Most recently, on 21 April the Kosovo police arrested Kosovo District Head Goran Arsić who was detained in custody for 48 hours.

While it is clear that elections for local parallel Serbia run municipalities in Kosovo will most likely not be organized, it remains unclear as to what is going to happen with the organization of the Parliamentary and Presidential elections in the rest of Kosovo. On his part, the Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi said that he will allow the OSCE to facilitate voting from Kosovo for those Kosovo citizens that have double citizenship. In his statement on 17 April he said that

that those citizens would be enabled to vote in parliamentary and presidential elections in mobile polling stations, with votes being counted in Serbia.

The situation is different though in the northern Municipalities in Kosovo, where Serbia run municipalities are the only effectively functioning local government structures. The legal mandate of the two municipalities of Zubin Potok and Zvečan in the North of Kosovo has expired, however new elections have not been called. Nevertheless, Serb leaders from the municipalities said that they would go ahead with organizing the voting regardless of the decision made by the authorities in Belgrade. It is very likely that the Mayors of the two municipalities, which come from the Serb Radical Party (SRS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), the main opposition to Tadić's Democratic Party (DS), will try to use this situation to escalate the situation so as to show the "weakness" of Tadić's policies in relation to Kosovo. Should the two Mayors of Zubin Potok and Zvečan decide to call new elections, a possible consequence of this action would be that the DS-led government in Serbia opposes this step by dissolving the local government structures in the two municipalities and putting them under direct central government support. This might trigger opposition protests and riots within Serb communities in these two municipalities, thus further escalating an already fragile situation in the North of Kosovo.

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