SERBIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WATCH

Volume one, September 3, 2002

On September 29, voters throughout Serbia will go to the polls to elect a president. This election will replace Milan Milutinovic, elected in 1997 and since indicted by the Hague War crimes Tribunal (ICTY) for his alleged involvement in war crimes in Kosovo.

This presidential election marks the first time that Serbian citizens will be able to choose between two or more democratic options for president.

NDI representatives in Belgrade are maintaining contact with candidates and activists trained in NDI's Political Party Program, and with the Institute's civic partner, the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID), as it conducts a non-partisan election monitoring initiative. This first update will provide a brief political background, synopsis of the electoral framework and listing of declared candidates. Throughout September, NDI will provide regular updates leading up to election day.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

This election comes during a critical period in Serbia's democratic transition. While political and economic reforms continue apace, the governing Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) coalition has faced several internal challenges related to the approach taken during the reform process. These disputes recently culminated in the departure of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) from the coalition. Led by Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica, DSS is the most popular party in Serbia.

Recently, DSS legislators were controversially released from their duties in the Serbian Parliament, reportedly due to poor attendance records. This event marked a turning point for the relationship between DSS and the rest of

DOS as the coalition voted for this measure. The upcoming election is the first time that members of the 2000 DOS coalition will face each other in republic elections. Animosity between these parties has led to a diminished faith in the democratic process, particularly in the DSS camp – several DSS officials have voiced concern that the electoral process will be manipulated by forces favoring Prime Minister Zoran Djindic.

CANDIDATES

Declared Candidates (listed alphabetically)	
Vuk Draskovic	Leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO)
Velimir Ilic	Mayor of Cacak Leader of New Serbia (NS)
Vojislav Kostunica	President of Yugoslavia, Leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)
Miroljub Labus	Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia Prominent Member of G17 Plus
Borislav Pelevic	Leader of the Serbian Unity Party (SSJ) and Serbian MP
Vojislav Seselj	Leader of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), MP in the Serbian Parliament
Velimir "Bata" Zivojinovic	Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)

Kostunica was elected President of Yugoslavia during the historic September 24th, 2000 election, which led to the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic. His current post holds few constitutional powers. Kostunica is not exempted by the constitution to candidate for another position, but would have to resign his

federal post if he were to win the republican presidency. Kostunica announced his candidacy on August 26.

Miroljub Labus, Deputy Prime Minister of the federal government, was nominated for the Serbian Presidency by a group of citizens. He has held public appearances throughout the country, campaigning on a platform of continued economic reform. Labus recently began a billboard campaign with his slogan of "Best for Serbia." While not an official candidate for the DOS coalition, Labus has garnered support from most of the parties in the coalition, including the Democratic Party, which is headed by Prime Minister Djindic.

Vojislav Seselj, Presidential candidate of the Serbian Radical Party, recently garnered the endorsement of imprisoned former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic (Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). This development served to drive deeper splits within the SPS as two rival factions contend for control of the party. Formally, SPS has nominated former Yugoslav film star Velimir "Bata" Zivojinovic as its candidate. Branislav Ivkovic, a former SPS official, would also attempt to run for president, but the Ministry of Justice refused his request to register his nomination as the SPS had already registered a candidate in Zivojinovic.

Recent polls show Kostunica and Labus as the two frontrunners in a close race. Other rumored candidates include Milan Panic, US businessman and former Yugoslav Prime Minister, Vuk Obradovic, leader of Socialdemocracy and Branislav Ivkovic, from SPS.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Campaign period

- Individuals have to declare their candidacies by September 8 and submit 10,000 signatures to the Republic Election Commission (RIK). One voter can support only one candidacy.
- The campaign period began on July 29.

- A candidate must be 40 years old and have resided in Serbia for 10 years.
- Only one representative from an individual political party can be nominated.
- The new president will assume the presidency with the end of Milutinovic's term on December 29, 2002.

Election day

- If fewer than 50 percent of registered voters cast ballots in the election, the election procedure will need to be repeated on December 1. This 50 percent threshold also applies to the second round of elections.
- A candidate needs to receive at least 50 percent of ballots cast in order to win. If no one receives this amount, the top two candidates go to a second round of elections on October 13.
- The RIK will announce the number of registered voters on September 13. The main question regards the status of voters from Kosovo. While many ethnic Albanians there will boycott the election, the RIK will likely include them on the voters list. The total voting population of Kosovo substantially affects the size of the Serbian voters list and would ultimately determine the 50 percent threshold upon which the election is declared valid.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

NDI partner, the Center for Free Elections and Democracy, with support from a host of international donors, will field approximately 10,000 volunteers to monitor the election at polling stations throughout the country.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) will also deploy approximately 200 international monitors.

Key Dates in Election Timetable	
July 29	Official campaign period began.
September 9	Prospective candidates must submit signatures to the Republic Election Commission (RIK) and declare intention to run.
September 13	Deadline to finalize the electoral rolls. Total number of voters should be announced by the RIK.
September 14	RIK announces the full slate of candidates.
September 29	Election Day
October 13	Second round of election (if necessary).
December 1	Re-run of first round if less than 50% turnout (if necessary).

NDI IN SERBIA

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI has supported democratization efforts in Serbia since 1997. NDI/Serbia works in the areas of governance, parliamentary development, non-partisan election monitoring, and political party building to bolster the institutions and practices that allow democracy to flourish. In preparation for these elections, NDI has provided training for democratically oriented political parties throughout Serbia. NDI continues to work with elected officials at various levels of government and in political parties, as well as with civic groups and special constituencies such as women and youth, to assist them in furthering the reform process.

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government. In Central and Eastern Europe, NDI conducts programs in Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. For more information on NDI's Serbia programs, please contact Paul Rowland or Damian Murphy at NDI's Belgrade office at +381 11 361 2942 or Edmund Rhoads at NDI's Washington office at 202-728-5500.