



SERBIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WATCH

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Serbia's First Presidential Debate

In another indication that Serbia's fledgling democracy is making advances, leading presidential candidates Vojislav Kostunica and Miroljub Labus debated on Wednesday night at the Belgrade based Media Center. This is the first time that such moderated debate between presidential candidates has taken place in Serbia. While not without controversy in the development stages over format, the debate itself was cordial as both candidates emphasized the need for voters to turn out for the second round of voting on Sunday, October 13 regardless of their candidate choice.

Both candidates agreed on the need for a new Serbian constitution and improved rule of law framework. The primary area of disagreement was over the pace of and approach to economic reform. Kostunica alleged criminal connections held by Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in an attempt to connect Labus with him.

The debate was carried live by Serbian state television, Pink TV, BK TV, and the Association of Independent Media.

The two hour format allowed for both candidates to make a five minute opening presentation, followed by debate on the economy, foreign relations, social policy, the constitutional organization of the state, and the rule of law. The last 45 minutes of the debate was dedicated to 17 editors of media outlets who were allowed to ask questions of the candidates.

Aside from the debate, there was little activity by the Kostunica or Labus campaign over the past two weeks. The campaign period again fell silent on Thursday night at midnight.

Voter Turnout

The critical issue at stake on Sunday is the possibility that less than 50% of voters will turn out. This is a valid concern. Radical Party candidate Vojislav Seselj, who secured 23% of the vote on September 29 (845,308 votes), has called on supporters to boycott the second round. In the event of less than 50% turnout, the entire election procedure would have to be rerun. A rerun election could include all the original candidates that

Presidential Elections 2002

On October 13, voters throughout Serbia went 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 marked the first time that Serbian citizens were able to choose between two 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 fifth NDI election update provides a briefing on the environment before the second round of elections.

NDI's Serbia program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

ran on September 29 and could result in some parties nominating new candidates for the position. If a rerun is called, the whole process, including nomination of candidates, collection of signatures and printing of ballots would have to be done again.

This rerun scenario happened in 1997, when the contest between Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) candidate Zoran Lilic and SRS candidate Vojislav Seselj failed to secure more than 50 percent turnout in the second round. Two months later the election was repeated, but the SPS nominated Milan Milutinovic who defeated Seselj.

According to the presidential election law, the election for president has to be held 30 days before the expiration of the current president's term. Some observers contend that because the first and second rounds of election were held within the prescribed dates, the law would not necessarily apply to a rerun election. If it is decided that an election rerun election needed to be held 30 days before the expiration of the President's term, the following scenario could apply.

There is some dispute as to the expiration date. Some commentators contend that it is December 25, the date that the Republic Election Commission confirmed Milutinovic's election victory while others say cite January 5, inauguration day. Using these two dates as a marker, a repeated election would need to be held between November 25 and December 5 according to the law.

The non-governmental organizations OTPOR and Media Pact have called upon voters to turnout on election day with nationwide media campaigns. In addition, the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle has encouraged citizens to vote saying that, "Democratically elected institutions, headed by the president are direly needed in Serbia.

We all have to be aware that insufficient voter turnout would seriously endanger the progress of state and society." The Serbian Renewal Movement has called upon its supporters to decide for themselves whether or not to vote. Former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who endorsed Seselj in the first round has not publicly expressed an opinion on turning out to vote.

NDI partner the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) plans to again field approximately 10,000 monitors on Sunday. OSCE will also field approximately 100 international monitors.

The pre election silence period began on Thursday night at 12:00 am.

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.

The 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.