

Why the International Rush for Government Formation?



The West should not be pushing the winning parties in the elections to form a government - when those same parties have no track record in delivering anything positive

The October 12 elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina brought no major surprises. I had been expecting more hue and cry over electoral fraud, given the obvious incentives for fraud (particularly by incumbents), reports of irregularities, and the OSCE-ODIHR's preliminary report, which included the determination that 25 per cent of the counting procedures observed were either "bad" or "very bad."

This may kick into a higher gear now, with the Coalition for Changes, comprising the Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, Party of Democratic Progress, PDP and People's Democratic Movement, NDP, calling for a recount of the presidential election in Republika Srpska. These complaints have yet to play out in the Central Election Commission.

Why the unseemly rush?

To be sure, some of the marginal changes seen in the newly announced - but still not final - results can have an impact in terms of allocation of relative power. Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska and leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, SNSD, narrowly won re-election and has announced a governing coalition for the RS. However, his candidate for the Serbian seat on Bosnia's State Presidency, the Republika Srpska Prime Minister, Zeljka Cvijanovic, lost to Mladen Ivanic, leader of the PDP.

The Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ BiH, seems certain to be the central node in a

By Kurt Bassuener
BIRN

state-level government. The Party of Democratic Action, SDA, is the largest party by far in terms of number of seats. Dodik's SNSD lost ground but still is the odds-on favorite to form a government in the Republika Srpska and be included in the state-level government - unless one of his coalition partners defects for a better deal - not least because his ally, the HDZ BiH leader Dragan Covic, wants him there. The SDS gained ground but with its coalition still fell short of forming a governing majority.

The Social Democratic Party, SDP, predictably imploded as a result of voter outrage and their sense of betrayal; party leader Zlatko Lagumdžija is resisting internal attempts to depose him. The only major questions left unresolved are whether Fahrudin Radončić's Alliance for a Better Future, SBB, joins the government and whether his ally, the Democratic Front, led by incumbent Croat member of the State Presidency Zeljko Komsic, joins any level of government.

Since the day after the election, there have been regular exhortations from diplomats and international officials for parties to quickly form governments at all levels, as well as to commit to long overdue reforms, particularly (following February's demonstrations) in the socio-economic realm.

Is there really an expectation that the reshuffle of the political cards will now deal a bet-

ter hand to the EU and other actors, or for that matter, to the country's long-suffering citizenry?

However it adds up, it is almost certain to amount to zero in terms of reform impetus. Whatever their competing agendas, the interests of the political leaders meet in wanting to ensure that they can abuse public resources and remain unaccountable to their citizens or the law. As one Western diplomat put it to me, in reaching the same conclusion, "Why care" - about the formation of a government? Why the unseemly rush, when the results are not even formally settled? Good question.

Theoretically, of course, reforms are possible, with political will. Yet, there is no discernible reason to expect that from any conceivable government configuration. It is simply not in the party leaders' interests under current conditions and incentives.

There is an evident hope that configurations of governments can be built around commitments to specific reforms - be they the EU's Compact for Growth (compact with whom, one might ask?), a coordination mechanism, other social reforms, implementation of the Sejdic-Finci ruling or more functionally oriented constitutional change.

The Basic Formula Is Simple

Yet, Dragan Covic has already made his fixation - resolution of the "Croat question" - apparent in his articulation of priorities: changes to the election law (a Croat-majority