

Results

Aleksander Vucic's Progressive Party almost achieves an absolute majority in the general elections in Serbia

As expected the Serb Progressive Party (SNS) of President of the Republic Tomislav Nikolic and led by Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Defence, Security and the fight to counter Corruption, Aleksander Vucic won a landslide victory in the early general elections on 16th March in Serbia taking 48.8% of the vote and 157 seats in the National Assembly (Narodna skupstina), the only chamber in Parliament i.e. almost an absolute majority, a first in the country's history.

Its government ally the Socialist Party (SPS) led by Prime Minister Ivica Dacic came second with 14% of the vote and 45 seats. The Democratic Party (DS) led by Dragan Djilas won 5.9% of the vote and 19 seats. It was followed by the New Democratic Party (NDS) led by former President of the Republic (2004-2006 and 2006-2012) Boris Tadic, who won 5.7% of the vote and 18 seats. Three parties representing the ethnic minorities of Serbia (Roma, Hungarians, Croatians, Bosniaks, etc.) also won seats.

The general elections of 16th March came two year's early after Aleksander Vucic asked for the organisation of a new election in order to "confirm public opinion's support for the reforms" He indicated that Prime Minister Ivica Dacic "had

not done a bad job" but that "things now had to gather pace." Just over one voter in two went to ballot. Turnout totalled 53% i.e. -5.7 points in the general elections on 3rd May 2012.

General Election Results of 16th March 2014 in Serbia

Turnout : 53%

Political Parties	% of votes won	No of seats won
Progressive Party (SNS)	48.80	157
Socialist Party (SPS)	14	45
Democratic Party (DS)	5.90	19
New Democratic Party (NDS)	5.70	18
Parties representing the minorities	4.20	11

Source : <http://eizbori.com/izbori-2014-rezultati-izbora/>

Serbia's leading political party, the Progressive Party has achieved its goal of spreading its influence in this election. "I want Serbia to continue its fight to counter corruption, for it to work towards growing its economy and for it to create jobs and to do what it needs in terms of painful structural reform," declared Aleksander Vucic. He announced the "adoption of 21

reforms between 15th April and 30th June before the summer break," and promised "a difficult time and a great deal of work but by the end of the year, we should be seeing the light at the end of the tunnel."

Aleksander Vucic's popularity in a country that is suffering major economic weakness is based on

several factors. Firstly the measures taken by the government over the last two years to counter corruption and organised crime. Several businessmen have been arrested over the last few months including Miroslav Miskovic on 12th December 2013 deemed to be the wealthiest man in Serbia, together with his son Marko and ten of his associates. They are accused of embezzling funds and tax evasion. Miroslav Miskovic was released on bail totalling 12 million €. "Corruption is suffocating Serbia. Corruption is impeding our policy, our civil service and our judicial system – it is damaging for business and the economy," repeats Aleksander Vucic.

The latter can also be proud of having gained the launch of negotiations for Serbia's accession to the European Union. These started on 21st January last. The Progressive Party hopes to see the country integrate the EU 28 by 2018 at the latest. Forced by Brussels, Belgrade has also started to draw closer to Kosovo, a neighbouring country, whose independence the Serbian authorities still have not acknowledged. On 13th April 2013 the two States signed a normalisation agreement focusing on several points. "The omnipresence of Aleksander Vucic and also the weakness of the opposition explains why the Progressive Party is doing well in the polls in spite of the serious economic situation and the unemployment," indicates Zoran Stojiljkovic, a political analyst. "Thanks to his anti-corruption campaign he has a great deal of support from the working class. In a context of economic crisis and rising unemployment he has offered them a target for their anger," stresses Predrag Simic, a professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Belgrade adding "it is a demagogic strategy but which has been successful and continues to be so."

Aged 44 Aleksander Vucic is a graduate from the Faculty of Law of the University of Belgrade. In 1993 he joined the Radical Party (SRS) a far right nationalist party led by Vojislav Seselj, who has been accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes by the ICTY in the Hague and

is in prison there at present. Two years later he became the party's Secretary General. In 1998 he was appointed Information Minister in the national union government chaired by Marjanovic which comprised Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party (SPS), the Radical Party and the Yugoslavian Left Party (JUL). He was elected to parliament on 28th December 2003 and re-elected in January 2007. In 2008 he joined the Progressive Party, founded by Tomislav Nikolic after its split from the Radical Party. He then became deputy chairman and won the general elections on 6th May 2012. But after this election, whilst Tomislav Nikolic was made president, Aleksander Vucic was forced to give up the post of head of government to the leader of the Socialist Party Ivica Dacic, who negotiated his party's participation in government at a high price. The early elections on 16th March will in all likelihood mean that Vucic will be the next Prime Minister.

Aleksander Vucic declared that he regretted some of his past positions, notably his opposition to Belgrade's entry into the EU – which he now considers as the best means to guarantee Serbia's prosperity – and claims that it is everyone's right to change his mind. "I cannot hide that I have change and that I am proud of this transformation," he maintains. "Aleksander Vucic is a strong man and the Serbs like that. The situation is such that people are looking for authority," declares Marko Blagojevic, an analyst at the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID).

The future government will have the heavy task of bringing Serbia out of a economic crisis which it has suffered for many years. The average wage is 38,000 dinars (327€); unemployment totals 20.1%. The budgetary deficit is over 7%; debt is above 60% and foreign investments have been declining for the last 7 years. On 17th January last the ratings agency Fitch sanctioned Belgrade's procrastination at introducing vital structural reform and downgraded Serbia's rating from BB+ to BB-.

The International Monetary Fund has started a

mission in the country to assess the government's finances in view of negotiations for the payment of a further loan to Belgrade. The previous loan totalling on 1 billion € was frozen in February 2012 because of the government's inability to fulfil the conditions set by the IMF.

According to Marko Blagojevic, the Progressive

Party should form a coalition government with other parties. "To implement reform which will be painful for the population we shall need other parties by our side," indicated Bratislav Grubic, a member of the Progressive Party's executive. Socialist Party leader Ivica Dacic has now already said that his party would oppose the reforms which target workers and the retired.

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