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Published at: 12-05-2008



***Serbs gave strong backing yesterday in parliamentary elections to the pro-European strategy of the outgoing government and President Boris Tadic. Although the Tadic bloc did not win an absolute majority, it emerged as a clear victor in the national poll. Graham Watson, leader of the pro-European ALDE group in the European Parliament said:***

"Liberals and Democrats congratulate the Serbian people on the defeat of the overtly nationalist forces in yesterday's election. Boris Tadic must now try to form a Government and show Serbia the way forward that focuses on the practical economic and social steps to closer integration to the EU whilst reining in Serb nationalists in Kosovo."

Jelko Kacin MEP (LDS, Slovenia), the European Parliament's rapporteur on Serbia and ALDE group spokesperson on the Western Balkans welcomed the results of these elections which clearly show that the persuasive majority of Serbian citizens are pro-European and pro-reform. "This is an important fact which Europe's leaders must take into consideration when deliberating EU policy towards Serbia", urged Kacin.

Kacin further praised Serbia for the conduct of yesterday's elections which were held in a free and fair manner. "The high turn out at the election further supports the assertion that Serbia is firmly anchoring itself as a stable and democratic country. Serbian citizens are clearly acutely aware of the importance and political consequences of their choices at the ballot box for the future of their country, their neighbours and the region in general. The results of the elections are evidence that the majority of citizens want their elected leaders to follow the signposts to the EU in order to achieve long-term stability and prosperity."

"Serbia's leaders must now set to work immediately to negotiate a durable and stable government that will fulfill voter expectations. The future parliament must set about dealing with issues which are of great importance for ordinary citizens, namely raising the standard of living, reducing unemployment, enticing foreign investment, and tackling crime and corruption."

"The EU is looking to Serbia's leaders to form a government as soon as possible in order to finish the tasks its predecessor government set itself. Number one on the new Government's agenda must be to complete full cooperation with the ICTY. Only this will pave the way for Serbia to progress further towards the EU; first towards candidate status and eventual EU membership", concluded Kacin.