



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Bosnia-Herzegovina Political briefing:  
What has changed after the elections  
Ivica Bakota**

### **China-CEE Institute**

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin

Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 [office@china-cee.eu](mailto:office@china-cee.eu)

 [china-cee.eu](http://china-cee.eu)

## **What has changed after the elections**

### **Election results**

On October 8, Bosnia and Herzegovina held general elections for State Presidency, bicameral state parliament, federal parliament, president of ROS, ROS parliament and cantonal/ district assemblies. These eighth parliamentary elections and seventh presidential elections since the implementation of the Dayton Agreement passed without major irregularities, although there were “standard” objections regarding voter registries. Voter turnout was slightly lower than on the previous general elections in 2014 (54.14%): at BIH level 53.36%, while on ROS level increased to 57.30%. Most importantly, according to the first preliminary results the main ethnic parties of three constituent nations, i.e. Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Croat Democratic Union (HDZ BIH) and Serb Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) received the majority of votes and will continue to be dominant political actors in Bosnian politics for the next four years. Civic parties, such as Social Democratic Party (SDP), Democratic Front (DF) and new comer Our Party slightly increased support relative to ethnic parties. Main contending parties or candidates, largely failed to make a big breakthrough on the state, republic and federal levels. Among them, Fahrudin Radoncic`s Union for a Better Future of BIH, Bosniak center-right, “one man show” political party is the biggest loser of the elections and is likely facing political marginalization in the next 4-year period.

The outcome of elections for State Presidency, highest executive body that elects three members of Presidency from three constitutional ethnicities on separate ballot, was hardly unexpected. Despite some “sobering afterthoughts”, current membership for State Presidency was suggested by the most polls. On Bosniak ballot, SDA candidate Sefik Dzaferovic won 37.17% of votes, around 20 000 votes more than SDP Denis Becirovic (33.49%) who ended on the second place. Croat ballot was controversial due to electoral provisions that

allow Bosniaks in the Federation to vote for Croat candidate. Here, despite the mobilization of HDZ voters and almost absolute majority their candidate Dragan Covic received in Croat-inhabited areas, pro-Bosnian DF candidate Zeljko Komsic won 51.56% to become the next Croat member of State Presidency. On Serb ballot the main battle occurred between incumbent Serb member Mladen Ivanic with broad based coalition Alliance for Victory and SNSD candidate and current President of the ROS, Milorad Dodik. Although Ivanic requested vote recount and warned on irregularities in some polling stations, it is safe to say that Dodik`s 53.83% of votes advantage to Ivanic`s 42.95% is enough for calling the victory.

### **Accommodating Dodik factor in Sarajevo**

Confirming the fears of Western media, after announcing the victory of his party and himself as a new Serb member in Presidency, incumbent ROS President Milorad Dodik told on the press conference that “official flag of the Republic of Srpska will have to be raised together with the Bosnian flag during his term in Sarajevo”. Due to Dodik factor, some opinions claim that Presidency won`t be able to convene regular sessions, let alone pass any important decision.

As it was previously reported, Dodik`s independence referendum threats, outspoken secessionist ambitions and anti-BIH rhetoric frequently collided with Sarajevo establishment; to the extent that, at this point, makes hard to predict that his behavior could bring anything but deadlock in the tripartite Presidency and looming fears of further political destabilization. It is still unclear whether the “conditional secessionism of ROS” was determined policy which Dodik in a new position plans to uphold as a tit for every tat coming from other members of Presidency; or if, notwithstanding his personal career calculations, he might have wisely chosen his new office to pre-empt destabilization that could occur if Sarajevo planned to draw a support from a weak Serb member to directly confront ROS with unitarist demands.

Ultimately, new office decreases impetus for secessionist agenda since Dodik is now on the side of central government and no matter how much he undermines or disrespects his new title, formally he is entrapped in the position to cushion and not to exploit or exacerbate the political conflict on Banja Luka-Sarajevo relation. The secessionist appeal relied on dramatization of miscommunication with Sarajevo; now, when he can veto every decision of Presidency it is harder to justify the steps toward secessionism as reaction to Sarajevo's "assertive unitarism". On the other hand, if Sarajevo is not acting any more as an archnemesis he is left only with international powers standing on the opposite side of secessionism. He is, therefore, forced to act more constructively in avoiding unilateral and risky steps toward the referendum. Unless, he decides to maintain currently frozen relations and blocks the work of Presidency indefinitely. Even in this case he still needs to play out this scenario with other two members or his idiosyncratic secessionism might lose support and dwindle his chances for re-election. He may resort to either inventing more extreme advocates of secessionism than himself or find new domestic traitors on British and American paylists, in both cases he should have more constructive or, at least, inventive role than some opinions predict. As an indication of his constructive approach he stepped in the current rift between Croatia and BiH over Peljesac bridge and in absence of Croatian voice in Presidency gave a side to Croatia.

### **Impostor in place of Croat member**

Zeljko Komsic is a Bosnian unitarist whose whole political career relied on accidental fact of being ethnically Croat, and making him thus eligible to run as candidate for Croat member of Presidency. He is also president of Democratic Front, a political party adorned with civic and multi-ethnic values but whose political success depends on ethnic vote or specific provision that allows Bosniaks to vote for Croat member. These observations were typically voiced in

Croat(ian) media in the last week before the elections to prepare the public for his possible comeback.

Komsic indeed came back but his political overture came as a surprise to everyone. His edgy wording of “being president despite/ regardless of those who voted against” was depicted as provocative at best. Croat politicians who seemed content with moral satisfaction of securing absolute majority in Croat areas and started with office-seeking calculations on federal level, now were forced to protest against particular disenfranchisement of Croat constituent ethnicity. Croatian PM Plenkovic joined comments by voicing the regret that the electoral outcome didn’t represent the wish of majority of Croats and “that he might not be a good choice for Presidency”. Komsic was on fire. Not only did he criticize Plenkovic’s interference and inflicting ethnicization in the Federation; but he pledged allegiance to Bosnia as his only homeland. Additionally, in excessive, somewhat Dodik-like manner he poked Croat public by saying that he rather speaks Bosnian instead of Croatian. If this was not enough, he reiterated his position on ongoing territorial dispute over Neum bay with Croatia, which made no concessions to Croat positions and resembled “hard position” espoused by Muslim political parties from Sarajevo.

Croatian media launched big smear campaign against Komsic who earned the title of impostor in Presidency and was even called a traitor among some Croat circles. Social networks are already sporting “Not my president” and “RIP Democracy” hashtags. In Mostar, the seat of HDZ BIH and unofficial “capital” of Croats in the Federation, local students organized march against Komsic’s presidency. Mostar University turned down Komsic’s offer to take over a building that served as the office for outgoing Croat president Covic, Instead, the offer was interpreted as a symbolic departure of power from ethnic Croats and recentralization of BIH.

Put bluntly, as much as Komsic’s ardent support of “Bosnia first” policy seems legitimate in the eyes of international tutors, what is the purpose of making artificial rift between Bosnian Croats and Croatia? Komsic can hardly

be described as espousing civic or federalist agenda when his support is based on ethnic key. There is also little reason to undermine legitimacy of his “nominal constituency”. In a long-run, his intentional alienation from his constituency can be justified only as a part of big strategy to emancipate Croats from its own crooked and deadlock-versed political elite. Promising fact is his personal integrity and unusually clean record without any corruption allegations. But, can this goal accommodate “cold turkey” tactics he now presents, and, ultimately, can he solve the prisoner’s dilemma of Bosnian ethnopolitics? Not likely.

### **Staying on Bakir’s shoulders**

Bosniak member of Presidency seems to be least concerned with trajectory of his political choices during the 4-year tenure. As a party apparatchik, Sefik Dzaferovic climbed on ladders by serving terms in cantonal ministries, federal and state-level HORs and HOPs. He excelled in loyalty as well as in opportunism, never making personal standout in affairs and relying on shared responsibility for dubious privatizations or war crime cover ups. His personal style may have helped to blunt unitarist and hegemonic tendencies within his party, but only up to certain extent. He remained SDA man and extended hand of his chairman and predecessor in Bosniak chair in Presidency, Bakir Izetbegovic. As a matter of fact, he confirmed to journalists that his personal ambition will be “to work like Bakir has worked”.

Taken on the state-level, this will mean that Dzaferovic will openly advocate genocidal nature of ROS, “federal hegemony” towards Croats, play with Bosniak nationalism beyond BIH and cultivate antagonizing relations with Turkey and some Gulf states. Predictability of his agenda aside, as the leading advocate and enabler of Izetbegovic’s will on the state level, he is not bringing any refreshment in inter-member relations. Some might say that he has not personal capacity to prevent more damage that could happened in direct confrontation of Dodik and Izetbegovic. Within his Bosniak constituency he is

considered as a politician that carries too much affairs and allegations behind, which in connection to his position in SDA is not conducive for boosting vote support.

In a Presidency triangle he will probably be closer to Komsic, but due to ideologic and acute political differences not to the extent to call him his ally - less close than the relation that two ethnic chieftains, Covic and Izetbegovic, developed in the last term.