



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Serbia political briefing:**  
**New Serbian Government Sworn-In at the National Assembly**  
**IIPE**

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## **New Serbian Government Sworn-In at the National Assembly**

*Four months after the parliamentary elections were held, Serbia got its new Government which sworn-in before the National Assembly on October 28. Its composition reflects the outcome of elections held at the end of June. Despite massive support Progressives won, post-electoral dynamics did not go smoothly. On the contrary, despite the absence of obstacles to forming the cabinet on its own, Progressives prolonged the Government formation until the constitutionally stipulated near-end deadline. The new executive authorities' election was the main process that occurred at the end of October, but the domestic Serbian political stage was burdened with other smaller-scale events and occurrences.*

### **The mandate of incumbent Prime Minister re-confirmed**

On October 5, Serbian President Mr. Aleksandar Vučić has nominated incumbent Prime Minister, Mrs. Ana Brnabić, for a renewed mandate. It took several weeks for the Prime Minister-designate to fill in 21 ministerial slots and to present her program to the Serbian Parliament. The structure of a new executive body is not surprising, having in mind that only three ministers in her cabinet are not politically affiliated to the progressives' bloc. While almost half of the previous term ministers have kept their role in the new Government, Socialist Party, a traditional Progressives' partner got only two ministerial slots – for education, science, and technological development and one without portfolio minister.

The new cabinet's mandate is severely questioned as “unconstitutional” according to some analysts. What was problematic is a disputed announcement issued by the Serbian President Mr. Vučić who stated this government's term will end in April 2022 latest, when new parliamentary elections will be held together with scheduled presidential and local ones. Acting as then incumbent, Mrs. Ana Brnabić presented her *exposé* to the Serbian Parliament on October 28, along with the list of proposed ministers for her cabinet. On the same day, the Assembly confirmed the proposed cabinet with vast majority of the MPs, subject to expected outcome.

Overall, there are six main goals of the new Government of the Republic of Serbia according to PM-designate program. As expected, the concern for the health of citizens and strengthening of the domestic health system came first, given the circumstances related to the pandemic caused by the COVID19 disease. She underlined the importance of the health system digitalisation, which would be transformed into modern information systems and will be integrated into a single system that will enable the exchange of all relevant data. Lastly, Mrs.

Brnabić highlighted the concern for the privacy of patients and their personal data, according to the highest security standards. Invoking the huge increase of health equipment in the global market, the candidate for the new Prime Minister pointed out that Serbia has a chance to use the health crisis as an economic opportunity with the knowledge of domestic experts in the field of medicine and production of health equipment.

The second goal of the new Government will be focused to preserve vital interests of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija province. A firm and comprehensive approach for improving the quality of life for the Serbian community in southern Serbian province, and insisting for implementation of Brussels Agreement signed back in the 2013, will be two key activities in the near future. The *exposé* describes Kosovo issue as “potentially the biggest challenge for long–durable and sustainable security and stability process for the whole region”.

It is fair to say that the fight against organized crime and a comprehensive “war against the mafia”, was enlisted as one of the goals of the proposed Government. As Mrs. Brnabić stressed, Serbia is committed establish and to develop the National Criminal Intelligence System as a mechanism to improve cooperation and exchange between state bodies, developed with the help of European partners, in combating organized and serious crime and corruption. As the last point for this goal, Mrs. Brnabić expects new scandals which would “undermine the trust of citizens in the highest holders of state functions and the state itself”. It, however, remained unclear what kind of scandals was she afraid of. Several days earlier, Serbia's President announced in a video message “the beginning of the war against organized crime“ on his Instagram account, which drew attention of the domestic public.

Indicating the “pro-European course” of the proposed Government, the PM–designate pointed out that at the international level Serbia will continue to pursue a policy of respect, friendship and partnership with the People’s Republic of China, to maintain traditionally friendly relations and strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation, as well as to work diligently to improve and build better relations with the United States. Likewise the EU Member States, the *exposé* stipulates that the Government of the Republic of Serbia will continue with implementation of the “Mini Schengen” initiative, with all “four freedoms” fully implemented (movement of people, goods, capital, and services) in order to contribute to stability and connectivity of the region.

Another goal for the forthcoming Government’s mandate is dedicated to provision of national security and defence. Addressing the Parliament, Mrs. Brnabić emphasized the importance of investments into the “security infrastructure”, into the military equipment, and into the overall improvement of armament quality.

The rule of law and acceleration of reforms on Serbia's European path is set as the fifth goal of the new Government. Prime Minister-designate stressed the EU as the key economic partner for Serbia, and once again underlined that the team she will be leading, is "pro-European". She also announced her cabinet's strong support for constitutional changes in area of judicial regulation to strengthen this branch of governance.

The very last goal of the incoming cabinet will be its dedication to continue and to accelerate Serbia's growth and transformation towards an economy based on innovation and knowledge. Mrs. Brnabić pointed out that most of macroeconomic indicators are on rise, but that strong political efforts need to be invoked to provide "continuity of such a success". Apart from these six main goals, some other such as the artificial intelligence development, tourism, sports, and smart and sustainable agriculture were also presented as important constituents of overall politics for the coming mandate.

### **Challenges ahead the new Government**

Kosovo issue and COVID19 are two key challenges ahead for the official Belgrade. The first week of November saw a severe increase in the COVID19 transmission in Serbia. More than 2000 patients were tested positive on a daily basis, overloading the health system. Serbian Minister of Health invited the public to "act like a massive self-isolation is imposed" over the next ten days, while both President and Prime Minister are calling upon further discipline of the citizens in their everyday activities. The new Government will experience its first major test in responding to dramatic increase of figures related to the ongoing pandemic in Serbia. Quality of institutional response will be measured as success achieved in the seesaw of economic needs on one, and well preserved public health on another side.

The second focal point for newly elected Government will be normalisation of the relations with authorities in the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija. The newest occurrence is detention of Albanian political leaders charged by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers & Specialist Prosecutor's Office (headquartered in the Hague), for committing war crimes between 1998-2000 against Serbian population. Some of them ranked highly in the Albanian forces during the conflict in Kosovo such as Kadri Veseli, Rexhep Selimi, and Jakup Krasniqi have already appeared before the Court, facing serious indictments for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The last one who was detained in the Specialist Chambers, under accusations for committing war crimes is Hashim Thaçi. On November 4, he resigned from Kosovo's presidency position.

### **Towards an uncertain end of 2020**

Despite nearly unanimous parliamentary support, the process of constituting the executive branch of governance has experienced severe critics by the oppositional leaders and some analysts. The main course over which the debate was driven, has related to reportedly intensified “autocratic practices” and “obstruction” of the democratic process in Serbia, as the post–electoral activities were “unreasonably prolonged”. A plethora of accusations was addressed to the Serbian President for the increasing single–party dominance. Moreover, President’s announcement of the mandate duration limiting, was denoted as “illegitimate” and “beyond his constitutional powers” by the oppositional parties.

Another burdening issue is the late international revival of war crimes committed by the Albanians in Kosovo, which brings another obstacle to negotiating process between Belgrade and Priština. This process is being facilitated in an unclear international context in which crucial changes (such as the election of a new U.S. President, internal crises and divisions among the leading EU Member States, and potentially, loss of interest in the region by the Russian Federation), might impede the process and add another layer within an already complex issue. Being that both Kosovo issue and COVID19 crisis are critically unfolding, there is no doubt that they will, in the coming months, shape Serbia’s internal politics.