



Weekly Briefing

**Bosnia-Herzegovina political briefing:
Whom will Dodik and Čović choose: SDA or its opponents?
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Summary

After the Central Election Commission confirmed the results of the election at the very end of the legal deadline, we can see who will be indispensable in the formation of the government. In the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats will have a comfortable majority with its coalition partners. In the Federation of BiH, it is certain that the Croatian Democratic Union of BiH will have control over the Club of Croats in the House of Peoples of the Federation of BiH and thus become an indispensable factor in the formation of the FBiH Government, although the formula for electing delegates to the House of Peoples of the FBiH is not yet completely clear after the high representative changed The Election Law of BiH and the Constitution of the Federation of BiH. SNSD and HDZ have a firm agreement on joint participation in government, so these two parties will be part of the majority in the BiH Parliament. Unclear remains the third part of the tripod for state government and HDZ's partner for government in FBiH. These are parties based in Sarajevo, where two blocs crystallized, the "eight" and the Party of Democratic Action - SDA. Only after the election of delegates from the cantonal assemblies to the House of Peoples of the PFBiH will it be known which of these two blocs will have control over the Serb and Bosniak clubs. Meanwhile, the buying of MPs and the transfer from one camp to another has begun.

Introduction

On November 2, the last day of the deadline for announcing the results of the General Elections held on October 2, the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced the final results. With that announcement, the deadline for accepting or rejecting the mandate began, which lasts seven days¹. Only after this deadline will the names of all representatives in the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament, the House of Representatives of the FBiH Parliament, the National Assembly of Republic of Srpska (RS), and ten cantonal assemblies be

¹ The CEC of Bosnia and Herzegovina announced: What is the deadline for mandate holders to decide whether to accept or reject the position?

<https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/oglasio-se-cik-bih-koji-je-rok-nosiocima-mandata-da-odluce-prihvataju-li-ili-odbijaju-funkciju/474021>

known.

Canton - Federation - State

It is known that some office bearers who ran for office will reject the mandate (Mayor of Sarajevo Benjamina Karić in the Sarajevo Canton Assembly), while some others will accept the mandates (Tuzla Mayor Jasmin Imamović in the BiH Parliament, Bihać Mayor Šuhret Fazlić in the Una-Sana Canton Assembly). What is still unknown is how the delegation bodies in the Parliament of the Federation of BiH and PS BiH will be filled. On the night of the election, the High representative of the international community for BiH Christian Schmidt changed the Electoral Law of BiH and the Constitution of the FBiH, among other things, in the part of the formula according to which the caucuses in the House of Peoples (HoP) of the PFBiH are filled, by increasing the caucuses of the constituent nations (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) from 17 to 23, and the club of "others" from seven to 11. These 80 delegates will be elected from ten cantonal assemblies according to the formula also prescribed by the high representative, which the parties from Sarajevo are not satisfied with, but the Croatian parties are².

Be that as it may, only when majorities are formed in the cantonal assemblies that will delegate representatives to the HoP of the PFBiH, will it become clear who will have the majority in the Bosniak and Serb clubs and thus have the possibility to block the election of the president and vice president of the Federation, therefore the further establishment of government - since the president and vice-presidents give a mandate for the prime minister of the FBiH. After all, this happened to some extent after the 2018 elections, when the Croat club did not want to elect a new leadership of the Federation until the amendments to the BiH Election Law were adopted, so Marinko Čavara remained in the position of FBiH president for another four years, and Fadil Novalić remained the prime minister of the FBiH (and other ministries as well).

Čović and majority

The deadline for the establishment of government is one month after announcing final results³, which means by December we will know how many delegates what parties will have

² Who (doesn't) love Schmidt? <https://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/ko-ne-voli-schmidta>

³ FBiH government under new rules: How and in what way will the clubs of Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and Others

in the Bosniak and Serb clubs, while it is likely that the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH* - HDZ BiH) will have the majority in Croat one⁴.

Anyhow, it seems that HDZ president Dragan Čović will have the opportunity to choose between two blocs of parties from Sarajevo. The first is the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije* - SDA) and its (rare) partners. The political relationship between HDZ and SDA in the FBiH has been going on since 1996, but it has been burdened by numerous disagreements between SDA leaders Bakir Izetbegović and Mr. Čović. One of the biggest disagreements concerns the cooperation of the SDA with the new-old member of the BiH Presidency, Željko Komšić and his Democratic Front (*Demokratska fronta* - DF). HDZ claims that Komšić was elected as a member of the Presidency of BiH from the Croat people by majority Bosniak votes and that the SDA participated in these activities in several elections⁵. This puts HDZ and DF at two distant points without points of contact - except for the fact that SDA wants to have DF in a broad coalition of parties from Sarajevo that will act jointly against HDZ, which SDA reminds of the long-term cooperation⁶. The DF is of a similar position, they suggest the three Sarajevo parties - SDA, SDP and DF - work together and negotiate with HDZ and SNSD on the formation of the government and strengthen the "Sarajevo Bloc"⁷.

The House of Peoples (HoP) of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly (BiH PA) is filled from the HoP of the FBiH Parliament - Bosniak and Croat clubs with five delegates each, and five delegates of the Serbian people from the National Assembly of RS (NARS). The BiH HoP does not participate in the election of the Council of Ministers (CoM) of BiH, thus that executive

be filled after Schmidt's decision. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/video-vlast-fbih-po-novim-pravilima-kako-i-na-koji-nacin-ce-se-popuniti-klubovi-bosnjaka-srba-hrvata-i-ostalnih-nakon-schmidtove-odluke-798517>

⁴ HDZ will have a majority in Croatian, SDA in Bosniak, and SDP in Serbian and the Others club?

<https://dnevni.ba/dnevni/hdz-ce-imati-vecinu-u-hrvatskom-sda-u-bosnjackom-a-sdp-u-srpskom-i-klubu-ostalnih/>

⁵ Dragan Čović decides on the future of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Revenge of Bakir or continuation of love? <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/781736/dragan-covic-odlucuje-o-buducnosti-federacije-bih-osveta-bakiru-ili-nastavak-ljubavi>

⁶ Izetbegović: HDZ is better off sticking with its old partner, I'm counting on DF.

<https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/izetbegovic-hdz-u-je-bolje-drzati-se-starog-partnera-racunam-na-df/>

⁷ Đonlagić: The answer to Dodik and Čović should be the state-forming bloc of SDA, SDP and DF. <https://faktor.ba/vijest/donlagic-odgovor-dodiku-i-covicu-treba-bit-drzavotvorni-blok-sda-sdp-i-df/180303>

body can be elected by a simple majority without any "big" party hypothetically. But every new law created or changed by CoM must also pass the BiH HoP, so the existence of a majority in this House is also necessary for work in a practical way⁸.

“Eight” as adventure

On the other hand, the political parties that supported the candidacy of Denis Bećirović, the vice-president of the Social Democratic Party of BiH (*Socijaldemokratska partija BiH* - SDP) who defeated Mr. Izetbegović in elections for Bosniak member of BiH Presidency, as soon as the CEC announced the official results, signed an agreement on the joint formation of the government. Agreement signed "troika" parties - Bećirović's SDP, the left-liberal Our party (*Naša stranka* - NS) and the right-conservative People and Justice (*Narod i Pravda* - NIP), which in the previous mandate led the government of the richest canton, Sarajevo Canton - and five parties that are parliamentary at the state or entity level: People's European Party (*Narodna evropska stranka* - NES), Bosnia and Herzegovina Initiative - Fuad Kasumović (*BiH Inicijativa* - Fuad Kasumović), Movement of Democratic Action (*Pokret demokratske aktivnosti* - PDA), For New Generations (*Za nove generacije* - ZNG) and Party for BiH (Stranka za BiH). Thus, instead of the "Troika", talk of the "Eight" has already begun⁹.

The “Eight” has slightly more representatives in both the BiH¹⁰ and FBiH¹¹ Parliaments than the SDA, which believes that such a broad coalition without the SDA would not be stable and would represent adventurism. They have already sent messages before that they would like to see the SDP, the single strongest party of the "Eight", on their side, probably with the additional support of the DF. However, the president of the SDP, Nermin Nikšić, has so far publicly quite clearly rejected the possibility of forming a government with the SDA, accusing them of many things, from the fact that the Prime Minister of the Federation of BiH, SDA cadre

⁸ This is how delegates to the Council of Peoples of the RS and to the houses of the peoples of the Federation and BiH are elected. <https://www.faktor.ba/vijest/ovako-se-biraju-delegati-u-vijece-naroda-rs-te-u-domove-naroda-federacije-i-bih/12500>

⁹ The “Eight” wants to be in power, in which there is no SNSD - And "the tycoon from Živinice in charge of forming governments at all levels is..." <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/osmorka-zeli-u-vlast-u-kojoj-nema-snsd-a-a-tajkun-iz-zivinica-zaduzen-za-formiranje-vlada-na-svim-nivoima-je-806174>

¹⁰ General elections 2022 - Confirmed results 02.11.2022.
https://www.izbori.ba/Rezultati_izbora/?resId=32&langId=3#/2/0/0/0/0

¹¹ General elections 2022 - Confirmed results 02.11.2022.
https://www.izbori.ba/Rezultati_izbora/?resId=32&langId=3#/4/0/0/0/0

Fadil Novalić, is on the American blacklist, to the current buying candidates for cantonal assemblies, specifically in the Tuzla Canton, in order to secure a majority in the House of Peoples of the FBiH Parliament¹².

Stable majority in the RS

In RS, the situation is much clearer. SNSD and Milorad Dodik won the elections, and will have a stable majority in the NARS. Considering the firm agreement they have with the HDZ BiH, it will be realistically impossible to bypass them in the formation of the government at the state level, although theoretically, instead of the SNSD from RS, representatives of the opposition parties could be part of the government - only if the HDZ agreed to such cooperation. However, there seems to be no will for this type of scenario in the opposition bloc: the leadership of the Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka* - SDS) led by President Mirko Šarović has resigned, and the reason is dissatisfaction with the election results. SDS, the strongest opposition party in RS, will elect a new leadership soon. They will hardly be interested in trying to bypass Dodik with reduced capacity in the BiH Parliament, as they did in 2014, but with a much better result¹³.

Dodik himself, the new president of RS, is of a similar opinion, who stated that there is a possibility that the government could be formed by election losers from the RS, but that this would lead to adventurism. He emphasized that he has an agreement with HDZ BiH leader Dragan Čović for the continuation of the partnership¹⁴.

Conclusion

As things stand, HDZ BiH waits the negotiations on the formation of the government completely relaxed. By amending the BiH Electoral Law, they have gained considerable

¹² Government without SDA – adventurism? Nermin Nikšić for Raport: It is an adventure that we were led by a man from the black list for four years. <https://raport.ba/vlast-bez-sda-avanturizam-nermin-niksic-za-raport-avanturizam-je-da-nas-je-cetiri-godine-vodio-covjek-s-crne-liste/>

¹³ Mirko Šarović and the SDS Presidency resigned. <https://raport.ba/mirko-sarovic-i-predsjednistvo-sds-a-podnijeli-ostavke/>

¹⁴ Milorad Dodik on the formation of government at the BiH level: First, Dragan Čović and I will agree on everything <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/milorad-dodik-o-formiranju-vlasti-na-nivou-bih-prvo-cemo-dragan-covic-i-ja-sve-dogovoriti/473337>

certainty that they will be an indispensable factor at the level of the Federation and, consequently, of the State of BiH. There is a possibility that HDZ decision will be made between the two Sarajevo political blocs based on who makes a better coalition offer for them, but the HDZ's long-standing partnership with the SDA and the strong animosity towards the DF should not be ignored. Both the SDA and the DF are aware of this, so the ideal solution for them would be to remove the SDP from the "eight", because then the HDZ no longer has the option to choose but to negotiate with the bloc that alone has the majority in the House of Representatives of the FBiH Parliament, and most likely in both the Serbian and Bosniak and the club of minorities in Houses of Peoples of FBiH Parliament. The SDA and the DF believe that in this way they would force the HDZ to make concessions and cooperate without the possibility of blackmails, but it seems that the SDP does not believe in the honorable intentions of the SDA in particular, and is currently sticking to the "troika" and developing it into a project of the "eight". That project is, again, on shaky legs, due to the very fact that it involves eight different political subjects scattered across the ideological field, which is difficult to maintain in the long run even in more stable countries. Also, individual members of parliaments in different levels from those parties could switch to the SDA side for various reasons, and pure trade should not be ruled out either. In the end, Dodik welcomes the negotiations with a relaxed attitude, as he returns to the position of President of the RS aware that nothing can be agreed upon in Sarajevo without him.