



KOSOVAR INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
Policy Brief Series
POLICY BRIEF #15

Decentralization in Kosovo I: Municipal elections and the Serb participation

Prishtina, December 2009

This project has been supported by Swiss Cooperation Office, Kosovo

Prepared by: Ilir Deda

Copyright © 2009 by KIPRED. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Please contact info@kipred.net or +381 38 227 778.

Published by



Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development
Rexhep Mala, 5A 2nd Floor
10 000 Prishtina, Kosovo
Phone and Fax: +381 38 227 778
www.kipred.net

I. Introduction

Kosovo completed one of the most challenging phases of Ahtisaari's Comprehensive Status Proposal (CSP) of creation of new municipalities and the process of decentralization by holding the municipal elections on 15 November, 2009. These elections were crucial in two aspects – they were the first ones organized after the declaration of independence, while the Serb participation was fundamental to legitimize the creation of new municipalities. Kosovo succeeded in both – showed the capability to organize autonomously elections, while the Serb participation was a blow to Belgrade and the idea of partition of Kosovo. The Serbs won in four municipalities, boycotted in three in northern Kosovo, lost in one, while the elections for the new municipality of Mitrovica North and Partesh/Parteš in eastern Kosovo should be held in May 2010. The overall Serb turnout was ten times higher in the elections in independent Kosovo than in November 2007, while Kosovo was still administered by UNMIK.

The overall climate of improvement of inter-ethnic relations has also affected the attitudes of the Serbs south of Ibër/Ibar vis-à-vis Belgrade. Determined to stay in their settlements south of Mitrovica, the Kosovo Serbs defied Belgrade and turned out in significant numbers in the largest settlements south of Ibër/Ibar – in Graçanicë/Gračanica and Shtërpce/Štrpce, the central and southern biggest settlements after Serb controlled northern Mitrovica. The Serb turnout in these locations was larger than in Belgrade held parallel municipal elections in May 2008 and August 2009.

With this move, they sent a decisive message to Belgrade, Prishtina and the international community – that their control over the new municipalities is the only viable option which will provide them with perspectives for a sustainable life and development, regardless the status of Kosovo. The Serb participation has effectively discredited the idea of partition of Kosovo, and gave a new impetus to a multi-ethnic state-building. Now it is the time for the government of Kosovo and the international community to take steps to ensure the trust of the Serbs in Kosovo institutions.

Unlike their compatriots in the south, the Serbs in the north fully boycotted the municipal elections. This boycott came as a result of three factors: intimidation and threats by the Serb parallel security forces, the mobilization of Serb radical political forces against the elections, and lack of credible Serb political entity participation in the elections. A Kosovo Serb political party in Zvečan – Union for European Future, which was certified for the local elections, withdrew days before November 15 after hand grenades were thrown to its leader's Bozidar Stojković's house.

All these factors were overseen and supported by factions of the government of Serbia, which kept sending mixed signals to Kosovo Serbs. President Tadić and prime minister Cvetković stayed out of the Kosovo elections debate after their statements in June and July that there were no conditions for the Serbs to participate in the electoral process. Serbia left the matter in the hands of the Ministry of Kosovo and Metohija, which had incoherent and inconsistent messages. Overall, the leadership in Belgrade expected a low turnout and was shocked after receiving information about a large turnout in Graçanicë/Gračanica. The state secretary of Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija admitted that the Serb turnout shook the

authority of Belgrade, while minister Bogdanović called for unity and stated that there would be no penalties for the Serbs who participated in the elections.

The international presence in Kosovo played a very positive role in encouraging the Serbs to participate in the elections after all misunderstandings among the Quint members were resolved on 15 September, 2009. Especially active were the head of ICO and the Ambassadors of the United States and Great Britain who frequently visited the Serb settlements in the new municipalities advocating and explaining the importance of decentralization and their participation in the elections.

This analysis examines the process of the creation of new municipalities from July 2009, and events which lead to a Serb turnout that surprised both Belgrade and the international presence in Kosovo. After two decades, Kosovo Serbs have turned towards their moderate political forces, which is a significant step forward. The Serbs have made their step towards confidence building, now it is the time for the government of Kosovo and the international presence to act in good faith.

II. The process

a) Prishtina

Most of the decisions regarding November 2009 local elections were made in the last minute, risking the success of the entire process. The lack of common agenda of the international community in Kosovo created a pre-election confusion which delayed many decisions of Kosovo authorities and the International Civilian Office (ICO), which almost brought the process of decentralization at the brink of failure. This lack of consensus involved conflicting opinions whether the new municipalities should be created, hence whether the elections should be held in 38 municipalities – as the law required, or 33. This debate was absurd given the readiness for of the Serbs to participate in the local elections in their municipalities.¹

Regardless of the confusion, the Central Elections Commission (CEC) began preparations for holding local elections in 38 municipalities. The CEC decided to follow the letter of the law and began compiling voters lists for all municipalities, regardless of the silence of the ICO, the Quint and the government of Kosovo. The CEC warned the ICO that once their municipal voters list were completed there would be no possibility to returning to a lower number of municipalities, and that a different decision would endanger the technical preparations for holding the elections in November.² Publicly, the CEC complained that it could not proceed with many electoral preparations without knowing the exact numbers of these districts.³

The ICO appointed members of the first municipal preparatory teams (MPT) – necessary to set the base for new municipalities according to CSP⁴ - for Killokot/Vrbovac on July 15,

¹ For background information, please see KIPRED's brief "Kosovo at a crossroad: Decentralization and the creation of new municipalities", July 2009, <http://www.kipred.net>

² KIPRED interview with CEC officials, July/August 2009

³ Statement of CEC Chair given to KTV, September 2009.

⁴ Supra note at 1

2009. The second team for the municipality of Graçanicë/Gračanica was appointed only on August 13 – days before the Serbia organized parallel elections, while the third MPT for municipality of Ranilug, on August 28, and for Novo Brdo on October 29, 2009. However, due to lack of a consensus within the members of Quint, the ICO could not proceed with establishing MPTs for Municipality of Partesh/Parteš and Mitrovica, although they had advertised for positions in these municipalities and hired staff for MPT of Partesh/Parteš. The ICO stated that the local elections in Mitrovica North and Partesh/Parteš would be held no later than 6 months after November 15, tentatively scheduling the date for May 16, 2010.⁵ The MPT for Partesh/Parteš was established in December 2009, while a new round of recruiting for MPT for Mitrovica North started on December 23.⁶

September 15 of 2009 was given as a deadline for certification of all political entities that want to run for local elections. This left Serb political entities and some influential local Serb leaders in a limbo, as they were not sure whether to apply for certification or not, not knowing if they would be running in the new municipalities.⁷ At the same time, 21 Kosovo Serb political entities applied for certification, with an alternative of withdrawing from the electoral contest if there would not be new municipalities. On September 15 the Quint gave the green light to the ICO to announce that three new municipalities - Graçanicë/Gračanica, Klllokot/Vrbovac and Ranilug - were ready for the elections.

The decision was announced in the evening of September 15, just a few hours before the CEC certification deadline. Some Serb leaders and political entities asked for the certification deadline to be extended, so they could prepare for certification, but this request was rejected by the CEC and all other stakeholders. As a consequence, many local Serbs, whose favourite leaders could not get certified or who rejected to apply for certification in the last moment, did not take part in the elections. In addition, the role that the Belgrade government played in stopping Serbs to take part of the poll remained consistent just like in previous elections organised in Kosovo.

Once the decision was announced, the international presence in Kosovo and the government of Serbia began a flurry of activities. The head of ICO and the Ambassadors of the United States and Great Britain started visiting Serb settlements and holding meetings with Serb political and community leaders to explain to them the benefits of new municipalities and the need for their participation in the elections. The stakes were high for the international presence in Kosovo which feared the low turnout of Serbs given their own mishandling of the process.

b) Belgrade

Serbia's top leadership kept a distance from the Kosovo local elections. The government in Belgrade left its Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija involved in the matter, which did not have a unified position and was divided between the minister and the state secretary.

While minister Goran Bogdanović's public statements were mostly conciliatory, the state secretary Oliver Ivanovic kept a hard line. Bogdanović claimed repeatedly that while Serbia could not support the Kosovo Serb participation in the elections, it was still a democratic

⁵ KIPRED interviews with officials from the government of Kosovo and ICO, November/December 2009

⁶ Ibid

⁷ KIPRED interview with a local Serb leader, Graçanicë/Gračanica, September 2009

right of the Serbs and that there would be no consequences for the ones who participate. Ivanovic on the other hand, used a threatening tone, claiming that there would be intra-Serb clash and that those who participate in the elections would carry consequences and lose the support of Belgrade⁸. Ivanovic publicly used threats such as “penalties for the Serbs who participate” and claimed there would be an intra-Serb conflict if new municipalities were to be created⁹. Behind the inconsistent statements stood the power struggle between Bogdanović and Ivanović, and their attempts to improve their position in Belgrade.¹⁰

The Serb Orthodox Church (SPC) got involved on the matter, issuing a statement of its Holy Synod by calling the Serbs not to participate in the elections organized by illegal institutions¹¹, causing the dismay of many SPC monks in Kosovo who silently opposed this call and who oppose the policy of Belgrade towards Kosovo Serbs¹². In reality, the Holy Synod never met to discuss the issue, but was written singlehandedly by Metropolitan Amfilohije.¹³ The official SPC was elaborated by Bishop Artemije who claimed that any Serb who participated in the poll would recognize and legitimize the independence of Kosovo.¹⁴ Artemije further stated that he did not understand the policy of Belgrade of sending inconsistent messages about Serb participation in the elections.¹⁵ Overall, it is the first time that Belgrade did not use all its instruments on the ground to oppose the elections.

c) The dynamics within the Kosovo Serbs

The electoral process polarized the Serb community in Kosovo. There were two groups, across the political spectrum, which were explicit in their positions – for and against the participation of the Serbs in the elections.

The inconsistency of Belgrade was the target of Kosovo Serb radical forces led by Marko Jaksic and Milan Ivanovic in northern Kosovo and parallel structures south of Ibër/Ibar. Through their Assembly of the municipalities of Kosovo and Metohija, Jaksic and Ivanovic involved themselves directly in the subject calling the Serbs to boycott the elections¹⁶. They also used the Serb National Council (SNV) for northern Kosovo as another tool to campaign against the elections¹⁷, and demanded from the government in Belgrade to call “provincial elections” for Kosovo. However, not all radical Serbs opposed the elections. Members of the parallel structures and of Serb Radical Party (SRS) south of Ibër/Ibar river, especially in Gračanice/Gračanica, created civic lists or joined Serb political parties certified for the elections.

⁸ Ivanovic: Učesnici kosovskih izbora rizikuju svoje radon mesto, <http://www.blic.rs/politika.php?id=118969>

⁹ Veliki i veci Srbi, http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/kaziprst.php?yyyy=2009&mm=11&nav_id=393114

¹⁰ KIPRED interviews with Kosovo Serb politicians, November/December 2009

¹¹ SPC website: http://www.spc.rs/eng/communiqué_holy_synod_bishops_soc_october_15th_2009

¹² KIPRED interviews in SPC, October/November, 2009

¹³ KIPRED interview in SPC, October 2009

¹⁴ Artemije: Srbi ne treba da ucestvuju na izborima,

http://www.rtv.rs/sr/vesti/politika/kosovo_i_metohija/2009_10_15/vest_157000.jsp

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Sadri Ferati: Srbi treba da izadju na izbore ako zele legitimet za nove opstine

http://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/srbi_treba_da_izadju_na_izbore_ako_zele_legitimet_za_nove_opstine.56.html?news_id=165080 – accessed on December 5, 2009

¹⁷ Milan Ivanovic: Srbi da ne glasaju na lokalnim izborima, <http://www.tanjug.rs>, archives, October 30, 2009

The intimidation by the parallel structures in Novo Brdo and Shtërpce/Štrpce was high, threatening the Serbs that they would lose the financial benefits from Belgrade or be arrested.¹⁸ But in central Kosovo, the parallel structures were not united – Rada Trajkovic director of the healthcare house in Graçanicë/Gračanica and one of the leaders of Serb National Council (SNV) and Randjel Nojkic director of parallel post service and the leader of Kosovo branch of Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) of Vuk Drasković openly defied Belgrade. They actively participated, called and advocated for Serb participation in the elections. The Serbian National Council (SNV) located in Graçanicë/Gračanica also split in two. While Rada Trajkovic lobbied and called for Serbs to accept the electoral process, while Dragan Velić with a group of followers refused, and with a limited number of delegates compiled a statement for boycott. After November 15, the SNV expelled Rada Trajkovic from its ranks with her followers Goran Marinković and Boban Petrović¹⁹. Trajkovic claimed that her exclusion was illegitimate,²⁰ a statement supported by the local SNC's in eastern and southern Kosovo.

This confusion benefited a faction of the government in Belgrade as well. Serbia cannot sustain the financial burden of the parallel structures throughout Kosovo due to the economic crisis, and keeps the cash flow mostly on northern Kosovo along with its strategy of partition of Kosovo along the Ibër/Ibar river.

A very important local actor turned to become the Kosovo Serb Independent Liberal Party (SLS), which participates in the government of Kosovo. The SLS party base lies in the Graçanicë/Gračanica region. In the Kosovo general elections of 2007, SLS received 701 votes. It has cooperative attitude with Kosovo institutions and is a part of them. Parallel with the activities of the “parallel institutions”, the SLS used its position within the Kosovo Government, mainly the Ministry of Communities and Return (MCR) to increase its power base. The SLS through the Kosovo's government mechanisms and cooperation with USAID has completed the reconstruction of the primary school “Knez Lazar” in Dobrotin, kindergarten in Preoce, healthcare facility in Suvi Dol, and repaired cemetery in Dobrotin. Through MCR, SLS directed over €800,000 for development of the community, by building a bridge in Dobrotin, building a bridge and regulation of a river in Vrbovac, and reconstructed a road between Preoce and Laplje Selo. It has also built a covered sports field in Graçanicë/Gračanica and a sports field in Dobrotin. Furthermore, it has build 60 apartments in Laplje Selo, 20 in Graçanicë/Gračanica and 14 in Dobrotin for Kosovo Serb returnees.

The Office of Community Affairs (OCA) within the Office of Prime Minister (OPM) had a significant impact into building confidence among the local Serbs. It has lead the communication with the Serb parallel structures and undertook infrastructural projects in central Kosovo, Ranilug and Novo Brdo. The OCA's involvement in Ranilug was instrumental in persuading the Serbs in the location to participate in the elections. It began constructing the water supply system as well as construction of roads. Further, it has initiated

¹⁸ KIPRED interviews in Novo Brdo, Ranilug, Shtërpce, October/November 2009

¹⁹ Rada Trajkovic isklucena iz SNV, Vecernje Novosti, December 1, 2009, http://www.novosti.rs/code/navigate.php?Id=1&status=jedna&vest=164225&title_add=Rada%20Trajkovi%C4%87%20isklju%C4%8Dena%20iz%20SNV&keyword_add=rada%20trajkovic%2C%20snv

²⁰ Iskljucenje iz SNV-a nelegitimno, Radio B92, December 2, 2009 - http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2009&mm=12&dd=02&nav_id=395823

building 30 apartments in Ranilug²¹. It has taken the initiative to build a hospital in Gračanice/Gračanica, and few dozen apartments in Shtërpce/Štrpce.

d) Parallel elections

In the midst of the confusion regarding the creation of the new municipalities, Belgrade went ahead and organized parallel elections on August 16, 2009 for “municipality of Pristina”- located in Gračanice/Gračanica, and “municipality of Pejë/Peć” – located in Gorazdevac. Earlier in April, the government of Serbia had dissolved these two parallel municipalities. In these elections, there were 26,090 registered voters,²² out of which 10,397 in the Kosovo Serb settlements in the municipality of Pristina, and 15,693 IDPs in Serbia.

In Kosovo, 3,545 voters or 35% of Kosovo Serbs turned out to vote, with the following results: Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) 1,201 votes, SPS-PUPS-JS-“Vidovdan” 700 votes, DS 588 votes, SRS 528 votes, Citizen’s group “Opstanak” 367 votes, and DSS 161 votes²³. These elections marked the end of the dominance of the Serb Radical Party (SRS) among the Kosovo Serbs²⁴. SNS, DS and DSS formed a coalition to govern the parallel municipality. This move surprised many as such a coalition has been unexpected and is the first of the kind among the three political forces. On October 29, the parallel municipal assembly elected a SNS member for the new mayor of “municipality of Pristina” and called the Serbs to boycott the November elections.²⁵

The low participation of the Kosovo Serbs shocked Belgrade. Their aim was to discredit further the process of creation of new municipalities and show that only Serbia can speak for the Kosovo Serbs. However, the reality on the ground was quite different. A number of Kosovo Serb leaders in Gračanice/Gračanica worked towards discouraging the participation in Serbia’s elections²⁶ preparing the ground for their own participation in Kosovo elections in November.

On November 29, Serbia organized parallel elections in the most northern municipality of Kosovo – Leposavic. Out of 11,888 registered voters, 8,224 or 67% cast their ballots. This is the first time that DS won in a municipality in Kosovo. The DS got 2,745 votes, SNS 1,540 votes, DSS 1,038 votes, SPS-PUPS-JS-PV 916 votes, NS 485 votes and SRS 448 votes²⁷. This was presented as a big victory for Serbia and a direct response to Kosovo organized local elections two weeks earlier. Also, it was a big success for the DS, also for minister

²¹ KIPRED interview with Srdjan Sentic, Director of OCA, October/November 2009

²² Serbia’s Republican Electoral Commission http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/sednice_frames.htm

²³ Ibid

²⁴ The Serbian Republican Electoral Commission (RIK), after counting the votes of IDPs published the following results: SNS 1,677 votes (32,7%), SPS-PUPS-JS-“Vidovdan” 1,016 votes (19,8%), SRS 777 votes (15,15%), DS 756 votes (14,7%), Citizen’s group “Opstanak” 482 votes (9,4%) and DSS 322 votes (6,28%)²⁴. The overall turnout according to RIK was 5,129 voters, or 19,66% of the overall electoral body.

²⁵ Odbornici pozvali na bojkot kosovskih izbora 15. novembra
<http://www.tanjug.rs/Dogadjaji/2009/VladaSrbije/oktobar/29.htm> - accessed on December 15, 2009

²⁶ KIPRED interviews with Kosovo Serbs leading parallel institutions in Gračanice/Gračanica, 14/17 August, 2009

²⁷ Serbia’s Republican Electoral Commission: http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/sednice_frames.htm

Bogdanović directly who began using the electoral results to strengthen this own position both within DS and the government in Belgrade.²⁸

The sharp decrease of the influence of SRS and DSS is evident from the results of the elections. It is the first time in two decades that the Kosovo Serbs are turning their support towards more moderate political forces. Having been the last and most loyal supporters of Slobodan Milosevic and Vojislav Šešelj since 1990ies, it appears that the epoch of radicalism has ended among the Serbs in Kosovo.

III. Participation

All the stakeholders were anxious on November 15 regarding the Serb turnout. Most had developed minimalist expectations, hoping that in the best case scenario Serbs would win in Graçanicë/Gračanica and Kllokot/Vrbovac. However, by early morning, the news of the turnout began spreading. There were consistent high numbers of the Serbs voting in Graçanicë/Gračanica and the surrounding villages. Later in the afternoon the Serbs turned out in Ranilug, Kllokot/Vrbovac, Novo Brdo and Shtërpce/Štrpce. The number was consistently low in Novo Brdo where the parallel structures kept threatening the local Serbs that they would lose their benefits if they turned out to vote. Not even the news from Graçanicë/Gračanica could mobilize the Serbs in Novo Brdo. The employers in parallel structures turned out in the early evening in considerable numbers in Graçanicë/Gračanica and Ranilug.²⁹

The 22 Serb political entities certified for the elections participated in 17 Kosovo municipalities³⁰, including the three municipalities in northern Kosovo – Zvecan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok. There was no Serb turnout in the north, but it was the highest in most of areas south of Ibër/Ibar. In both rounds on November 15 and December 13, over 10,000 Serbs cast their ballots, up from roughly 1,300 in 2007. The overall Serb electoral body in Kosovo is estimated to be around 80,000.³¹

The SLS played a crucial role to mobilize the Serbs in Graçanicë/Gračanica, Kllokot/Vrbovac and Shtërpce/Štrpce. They have developed a powerful party structure, and have used their participation in the government of Kosovo to expand their influence. Rada Trajkovic and Randjel Nojkić also played a very important role in mobilizing the Serbs in Graçanicë/Gračanica. The Office of Community Affairs (OCA) within the Office of Prime Minister played the decisive role to mobilize the turnout in Ranilug.

a) Turnout, facts and figures

The municipal elections on November 15 were held to elect the new mayors and municipal assemblies. In municipalities where mayoral candidates did not receive sufficient votes, a

²⁸ KIPRED interview with a Kosovo Serb politician, 17 December 2009.

²⁹ KIPRED observers in Graçanicë/Gračanica and Ranilug, November 15, 2009.

³⁰ The Kosovo Serb parties were certified in the following municipalities: Gjiilan, Istog, Kamenica, Lipjan, Novo Brdo, Obiliq, Rahovec, Shtërpce, Ferizaj, Viti, Vushtrri, Graçanicë/Gračanica, Ranilug, Kllokot, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic.

³¹ This rough number is extracted by KIPRED from the voters list of Central Elections Commission and estimates of percentage of population in municipalities of Kosovo.

runoff was held on December 13. The Kosovo Serb parties won on the first round the mayoral posts in three municipalities – Graçanicë/Gračanica, Klllokot/Vrbovac and Ranilug, while runoffs decided the mayors in Novo Brdo and Shtërpce/Štrpce. Also, the Kosovo Serb parties won the majority in the assemblies of Graçanicë/Gračanica, Klllokot and Ranilug, while they lost in Novo Brdo and Shtërpce/Štrpce where the Serbs constitute roughly 75% of the total population.

In Graçanicë/Gračanica out of 16,317 voters, there are estimated 14,000 Kosovo Serbs. 3,854 (24%) turned out to vote out of which 3,723 Serbs and 131 Albanians. The SLS received 2,216 (61%) for the mayor and 2,139 (60%) for the local assembly. Vidovdan received 423 votes (12%), Serbian Resistance Movement (SPOT) 393 (11%), Serb Democratic Party for Kosovo and Metohija (SDSKiM) 208 (6%), Serbian Kosovo-Metohija Party (SKMS) 135 (4%).

In Klllokot/Vrbovac out of 2,706 voters, 687 turned out (25,4%). Only two parties ran, the SLS and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The SLS won 510 (100%) votes for the mayor, and 401 votes (65%) for the municipal assembly.

In Ranilug out of 4,822 voters, 670 (14%) turned out, where a civic independent list Civic List for Better Ranilug (GIZOR) lead by the local SPO president won both the contest for the mayor with 421 votes (71%) and the local assembly with 411 votes (73%). The SKMS received 153 votes (27%).

In Novo Brdo out of 7,939 voters, 2,035 (26%) turned out. 585 Kosovo Serbs turned out and 1,450 Albanians. The Serbs lost dominance in both the local assembly and the mayoral contest, although they constitute 75% of the total population in the municipality. The Civic Initiative for Better Future (GIZBB) lead by Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) received 237 votes (13%), Union of Independent Social-Democrats (SNSD) 212 votes (11%), and SLS 103 votes (6%). The Kosovo Albanian parties received – LDK 619 votes (30%), Alliance of New Kosovo (AKR) 316 votes (16%), Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) 223 votes (11%) and Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) 132 votes (6%). Out of 15 members of the local assembly the Serb parties received 5 and the Albanian ones 10 members.

In the mayoral runoff on December 13 in Novo Brdo 2541 voters turned out (33%) out of which the LDK candidate for mayor received 2,032 votes (81%), and the Serb candidate from SNSD received 479 votes (19%). It's very important to note that many Serbs voted for the LDK candidate, the current mayor.³² The Serbs claim that the mayor has done a lot for them, directly assisted the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Klokubar, undertook infrastructural projects and most importantly visited them after every single incident³³. Even the NGOs close to SPC claim that LDK has done more for them than the parallel municipality. On the other hand, the SNSD accused the LDK for massive fraud, and at one point during December 13 called the ICO to ask if they could steal votes as well³⁴

In Shtërpce/Štrpce out of 12,260 voters there are roughly 8,700 Kosovo Serbs, and 3,500 Kosovo Albanians. 3,789 (31%) turned out to vote, out of which 1,626 Serbs and 2,163

³² KIPRED observers in Novo Brdo December 13, 2009. KIPRED interviews with Serb voters, members of political parties and local SPC clergy.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ KIPRED interview with ICO and SNSD officials, December 14/15, 2009.

Albanians in the first round. The SLS received 1,330 (40%) for the mayor and 1,258 (40%) for the local assembly. The civic list Together for Sirinic Zupa (ZZSZ) led by local SPO received 157 votes (5%). The other 5 Serb lists received 4% of the vote and did not receive representation in the local assembly. The Kosovo Albanian parties received the following votes: PDK 775 (25%), PSK 386 (12%) and LDK 375 (12%). Out of 19 members in the local assembly, the Kosovo Albanian parties received 10 members, while 9 belong to two Kosovo Serb parties.

In the mayoral runoff on December 13 in Shtërpce/Štrpce, 6,343 voters turned out (54,3%), out of which 4,345 Serbs and 2,344 Albanians. The SLS candidate won 65%. The Serb turnout was larger than in any previous elections, and much larger than in parallel elections organized by Serbia in 2008 when approximately 3,500 Serbs voted in Shtërpce/Štrpce³⁵. The high Serb turnout was the biggest surprise, and employees of the parallel structures participated as well – namely from healthcare and education, some of them openly calling for participation in the elections.³⁶ There appears to have been a silent consensus among the Serbs in Shtërpce/Štrpce to support the SLS, given the upcoming privatization of the ski resort and the supporting facilities. Also, the Serbs are aware of the importance of the new municipality and the benefits it will provide to them.

IV. Conclusion

The Serb satisfactory turnout in the elections, by which the new municipalities were legitimized, is a remarkable step which fundamentally changes the inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo. The Serb participation was ten times higher than in the elections in November 2007. For the first time after two decades, Kosovo Serbs have turned towards moderate political forces, sending a signal for cooperation and inclusion within the institutional framework of Kosovo.

The successful conclusion of the electoral process, the first one in an independent Kosovo, represents a cornerstone for building a multi-ethnic state and a multi-cultural society. Further, the Serbs have sent a clear message against partition of Kosovo to Belgrade, Prishtina and the international community. This should be a clear message to follow by the donors and the Kosovo government through rapid and concrete strategic projects of investments in the new municipalities and other Serb settlements.

Apart from northern Kosovo, in the rest of the areas south of Ibër/Ibar the relations between the Albanians and the Serbs will be dealt through legitimate institutions and following a legal path. This will mark a new dimension in the development of Kosovo's society. The territorial integrity will also depend on this process.

The main challenge lies ahead to organize a new set of local elections in northern Kosovo, primarily for Mitrovica North in May 2010. The international community in particular the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and the ICO with the government of Kosovo should create a climate of safety, security and economic perspective for the Serbs in the north. The Serbs will be intimidated and physically threatened as long as

³⁵ Combined with IDPs in Serbia, Serbia's Republican Electoral Commission (REC) gave a total amount of 4,787 votes in Shterpce. However, REC did not provide the breakdown, and the number KIPRED is using comes from information and interviews on the ground in Shterpce.

³⁶ KIPRED observers in Shterpce, December 13, 2009.

the intelligence and security parallel structures continue to operate freely in the area. With such a climate, any attempts to organize elections in the north will be unsuccessful.