

# **FINAL REPORT**

Republic of Serbia

## **PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

21 June 2020

## **AEGEE ELECTION OBSERVATION**





*Picture in the front page: Patricio Borvarán*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND INTRODUCTION

AECEE Election Observation is an independent European initiative which provides a youth perspective on elections in Europe. This is done by deploying young people on election observation missions to gain experience in election monitoring and to specifically assess youth engagement in the electoral process as voters, candidates, and civil society members. AECEE Election Observation is independent in its findings and conclusions.

Parliamentary elections were originally scheduled in the Republic of Serbia for 26 April 2020 and postponed to 21 June of the same year after a state of emergency was declared by the

government in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

AECEE Election Observation decided to cancel the deployment of election observers due to the health risks related to the pandemic. The team of coordinators conducted research and interviews remotely and spoke with experts working on elections and civil society in Serbia.

The AECEE Election Observation team would like to use the opportunity to thank all its interlocutors for their valuable contributions to the successful completion of this limited observation mission.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Serbian Parliamentary elections were held in the context of two major events, the COVID-19 pandemic and partial boycott by opposition parties.

Due to the pandemic and a state of emergency, the elections were postponed to 21 June 2020.

Rallies and election campaigns were thus temporarily suspended, then mainly conducted through social media, and only partly held physically.

Since late 2018, peaceful rallies denounced “the rise of authoritarian tendencies of the government and the lack of media freedom”[1]. In line with the protests, part of the opposition parties decided to boycott the Elections since they criticized a “lack of conditions for a genuinely democratic process”[2].

A total of 3,419 candidates competed for the 250 seats in the National Assembly including 590 candidates 30 years old and younger. Young candidates across all lists were nominated to some extent proportionately but generally occupy less favourable positions.

Nonetheless, there was an increase of the representation of young people compared to the 2016 elections. 28 candidates 30 years of age and younger were elected into the Assembly, which equals 11.2 per cent of the 250 possible seats in total.

As indicated by AEGEE interlocutors, the youth in Serbia is generally less informed about political developments compared to other age groups. Political parties and especially their youth branches and candidates addressed the youth mainly through social media and online activities.

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[1] OSCE/ODIHR NAM 2019, 3 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/a/442735.pdf>

[2] OSCE/ODIHR NAM 2019, 4 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/a/442735.pdf>

## BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The previous Parliamentary elections took place on 24 April 2016. The then Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić retained his majority and won with the SNS (Serbian Progressive Party)-led coalition 131 of the 250 seats available. In 2017, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić ran for the Office of President of Serbia and was elected so on 2 April 2017. He nominated the then non-partisan Ana Brnabić as new Prime Minister, who was appointed as first woman Prime Minister by the National Assembly on 29 June 2017. She later joined the SNS in October 2019.

Initially, the elections were scheduled for 26 April 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic a state of emergency was declared on 16 March and lifted on 6 May 2020, and the elections were postponed to 21 June 2020. The elections in Serbia were the first in Europe and Eurasia to be rescheduled and held[3] following the waves of postponements and cancellations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic[4].

The elections took place in a context of deep polarization, accusations of democratic backsliding on the part of the executive branch[5] and a boycott of several opposition parties citing lack of conditions for a genuinely democratic process[6]. These elections were held against the backdrop of peaceful rallies that have been taking place since late 2018 “denouncing the rise of authoritarian tendencies of the government and the lack of media freedom”[7] and that grew over time[8].

Following an invalidation of the voting on 234 polling stations due to irregularities proclaimed by the Republic Electoral Commission, a repeat

process was scheduled for 1 July 2020.

Out of the 21 lists registered, 7 succeeded to enter the National Assembly. The SNS list of President Aleksandar Vučić won 188 of the possible 250 seats in total. The further six lists include the SPS-JS and SPAS, and with the VMSZ, SSP-DPM, ADA, and SDA-S further four minority lists[9].

The final voter turnout is 3,221,908[10] out of a total of 6,583,655 citizens eligible to vote[11].

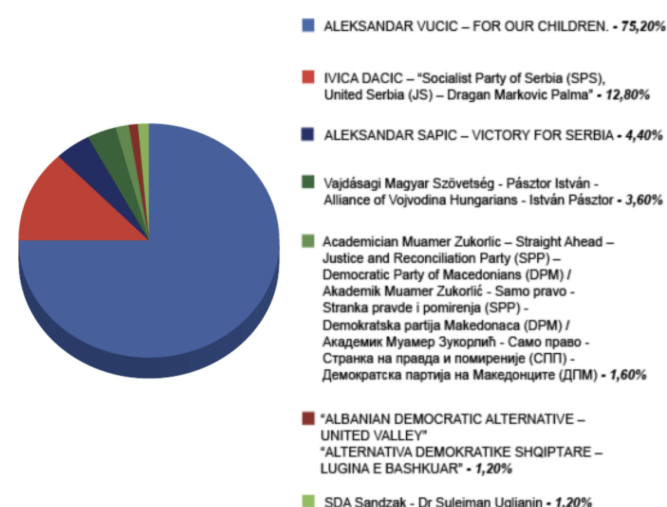


Chart - percentage of mandates won [12]

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia are regulated primarily by the current Constitution adopted in 2006, the Law on Election of Representatives (LER), the Law on the Unified Voters' Register (LUVR), the Law on Public

[3] Intended as a large national scale. The Czech Republic held a by-election for the Teplice Senate seat on 5 and 6 June 2020. The election was originally scheduled for 27 and 28 March 2020 <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>

[4] IFES 2020, 1 [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes\\_faqs\\_elections\\_in\\_serbia\\_2020\\_parliamentary\\_elections\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_serbia_2020_parliamentary_elections_june_2020.pdf)

[5] IFES 2020, 1 [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes\\_faqs\\_elections\\_in\\_serbia\\_2020\\_parliamentary\\_elections\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_serbia_2020_parliamentary_elections_june_2020.pdf)

[6] OSCE/ODIHR NAM 2019, 4 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/a/442735.pdf>

[7] OSCE/ODIHR NAM 2019, 3 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/a/442735.pdf>

[8] European Commission 2019 - Serbia Report - Commission Staff Working Document, 3 <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>

[9] Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) - United Serbia (JS); Serbian Patriotic Alliance (SPAS); Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (VMSZ); Justice and Reconciliation Party (SSP) - Democratic Party of Macedonians (DPM); Party for Democratic Action (ADA); Party of Democratic Action of Sandžak (SDA-S).

[10] The turnout takes into consideration the elections held on 21 June and 1 July 2020 <http://www.parlament.rs/national-assembly/national-assembly-in-numbers.1743.html>

[11] <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/157262/republic-election-commission-announces-electoral-lists-for-21-june-parliamentary-elections.php>

[12] Chart from the website of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia <http://www.parlament.rs/national-assembly/national-assembly-in-numbers.1743.html>

Gatherings[13]. The laws are supplemented by the Republic Electoral Commission's (REC's) Rules of Procedures and further through instructions and decisions to be adopted by the REC after the calling of elections.

All 250 Members of the Parliament (MPs) are elected in a single multi seats constituency by use of a proportional electoral system[14]. Every citizen of the Republic of Serbia who is 18 years of age and officially resides in the Republic of Serbia has the right to elect MPs and be elected as MP, except those who lost legal capacity through a court decision. Out-of-country citizens of Serbia, having a permanent residence in Serbia and temporarily residing abroad, are allowed to vote in person at Serbian diplomatic consular missions[15].

According to the Constitution, the elections should be called by the President 90 days before the expiry of the current Parliament's term[16]. The date of the elections was announced on 4 March 2020 which is in the respective period. The Constitution's requirement of not less than 45 days, and no more than 60 days shall pass between the day of calling of the elections and election day was expanded due to the state of emergency[17].

The results of the elections shall be announced by the Republic Election Commission within 96 hours from the end of the voting[18] and are published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia". Article 109 of the Constitution states that the National Assembly shall be dissolved if it does not elect a government within 90 days from the day the Assembly is constituted[19].

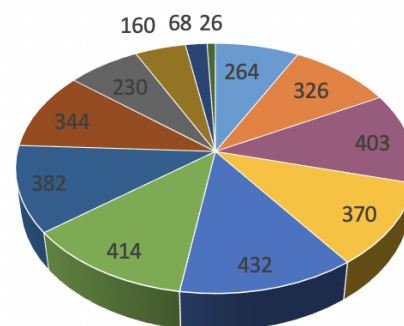
## PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

Although young candidates were positioned in less favourable positions in the party lists

compared to previous elections, significantly more young candidates were elected into the Assembly. In fact, 68 MPs 35 years of age and younger including 28 MPs of the age range 18-30 succeeded to enter the Assembly.

A total of 3,419 candidates competed for the 250 seats in the National Assembly. Candidates under 35 years old were 993 which equals 29 per cent of the total and specifically candidates in the 18-30 age range were 590 which equals 17.3 per cent of all candidates[20].

### Candidates divided by age groups



■ ≤ 25   ■ (25, 30]   ■ (30, 35]   ■ (35, 40]   ■ (40, 45]   ■ (45, 50]  
 ■ (50, 55]   ■ (55, 60]   ■ (60, 65]   ■ (65, 70]   ■ (70, 75]   ■ > 75

Chart - candidates divided by age groups [21]

Looking at the age group 18-35, 68 candidates were elected into the Assembly, which amounts to more than a quarter of all mandates with 27.2 per cent. Thus, 28 candidate 30 years of age and younger were elected which equals 11.2 per cent of the 250 possible seats in total[22].

If the candidates 25 years of age and younger are considered separately, it is noticeable that they are, compared to their candidatures, disproportionately less elected than other age groups.

[13] OSCE/ODIHR NAM 2019, 4

<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/a/442735.pdf>

[14] <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/national-assembly/role-and-mode-of-operation/elections-and-electoral-system.502.html>

[15] <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/narodna-skupstina-.871.html>

[16] <https://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/tekst/en/59/constitution-of-the-republic-of-serbia.php>

[17] <https://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/tekst/en/269/parliamentary-elections.php>

[18] <https://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/tekst/en/269/parliamentary-elections.php>

[19] <https://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/tekst/en/59/constitution-of-the-republic-of-serbia.php>

[20] <http://www.parlament.rs/national-assembly/national-assembly-in-numbers/age-structure.1746.html>

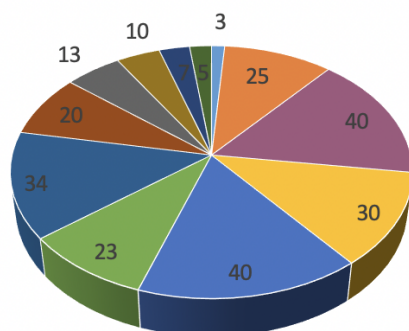
[21] Estimation made by the AEGEE team to Serbia based on birth dates of nominated candidates born in 1990 and later through the list of candidates that can be found here:

<https://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/tekst/1937/izborne-liste.php>

[22] Chart made by AEGEE Election Observation.

[23] <http://www.parlament.rs/national-assembly/composition/members-of-parliament/current-legislature.31.487.html>

## Elected MPs divided by age groups



■ ≤ 25   
 ■ (25, 30]   
 ■ (30, 35]   
 ■ (35, 40]   
 ■ (40, 45]   
 ■ (45, 50]   
 ■ (50, 55]   
 ■ (55, 60]   
 ■ (60, 65]   
 ■ (65, 70]   
 ■ (70, 75]   
 ■ > 75

Chart - candidates divided by age groups [23]

Since it is only possible to vote lists as a whole, candidates are elected to the National Assembly if their positions on the list are included within the number of seats won by their respective list. The position on the list is therefore crucial to the probability of being elected to the Assembly.

Compared to the distribution of all candidates, MPs of the age range 18-30 are 6.1 per cent less represented than the distribution on the lists would have suggested. Regarding candidates under 35, the difference is only 1.8 per cent lower. This indicates that younger candidates across all lists were nominated to some extent proportionately but generally occupy less favourable positions. However, there was an increase of the representation of young people compared to the 2016 elections.

The majority of young MPs 30 years of age and younger (24 out of 28)[24] were elected from the SNS list.

One reason for the increased representation is that the votes gained by the SNS increased the party parliamentary representation of 57 seats, thus allowing young candidates from the 'back' of the SNS list to make the leap into the Assembly.

## Recommendation

**Legal measures similar to the ones already in place for gender quota should be established to facilitate youth participation as candidates and enhance their representation.**

## VOTER EDUCATION

There was no large-scale voter education campaign directly targeting youth and first-time voters.

AEGEE interlocutors criticized the lack of education in particular for young voters, leaving them insufficiently informed in light of the exercise of their voting rights. They also affirmed that although education on election and civil rights are implemented in the high school curriculum, the education remains on a basic level.

The curriculum covers mainly the general political system, while education on election is only partially taught. Yet, the course on election and civil rights is not mandatory for students as they can also opt to take a course on religious education instead. Interlocutors reported that specific voter education was even more neglected compared to previous elections.

Additionally, no specific information was delivered to youth regarding the context of COVID-19 and the elections.

## Recommendation

**AEGEE Election Observation emphasizes the importance of voter education and encourages Serbian authorities to target younger generations and first-time voters with specific information campaigns and programmes.**

[23]Chart made by AEGEE Election Observation.

[24]A closer look at the positions on this list shows that 10 out of 24 young MPs were nominated following position 131, which was the result of the list in the previous election in 2016. A similar pattern can be observed at the MPs

35 years of age and younger: 26 out of 58 MPs were nominated in the range in which the SNS gained votes compared to the previous election. The large number of young MPs can be therefore mainly explained by the gains of the SNS.



## ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The campaign remained low-key with only sporadic smaller meetings between parties and voters while large-scale rallies were postponed due to the state of emergency declared by the government.

The presence of candidates and parties on traditional media and social media increased significantly. Some issues have been highlighted as a serious concern by AEGEE interlocutors such as the use of Twitter bots also during the electoral silence period. Although young people are more inclined to use social media, they have not been particularly addressed in this campaign. AEGEE interlocutors described the youth as a passive audience and political parties lacked programmes and interests towards younger generations.

In addition, CSOs have reported that governing parties had more access to administrative resources compared to opposition parties, thus creating a disadvantage in terms of use of resources among parties and blurring the difference between official duties and electoral campaigning[25].

### Recommendation

**Political parties are recommended to take into consideration youth issues and to positively use their increased presence on-line as an opportunity to address youth needs and solutions.**

## ELECTION DAY

Voting took place in 8,253 polling stations in Serbia staffed by 49,770 polling station workers, 90 polling stations across Kosovo\*[26] and 43 polling stations across diplomatic consular missions around the world. Out-of-country voters voted between 20 and 21 June 2020, depending on the country[27]. AEGEE Election Observation did not deploy election observers in Serbia due to travel restrictions and health risks across Europe.

Notable, but still limited observation, took place by international organisations such as the OSCE Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights and the European Network of Organisations for Election Monitoring (ENEMO). 111 international observers were present in the country and a number of 3,341 domestic observers was recorded[28].

In addition, several local organisations observed the Election-Day such as the Center for Free and Elections and Democracy (CeSID), the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), and the Anti-Corruption Agency.

[25]CeSID Preliminary report (2020) and interviews conducted by the AEGEE election team to Serbia have underlined that this has occurred mostly through the President Aleksandar Vučić public appearances.

[26]All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

[27]IFES 2020, 1

[https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes\\_faqs\\_elections\\_in\\_serbia\\_2020\\_parliamentary\\_elections\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_serbia_2020_parliamentary_elections_june_2020.pdf)

[28]<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/157890/parliamentary-provincial-local-elections-held-in-serbia-today.php>

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