

# BALKAN ELECTIONS - MORE SURPRISES

**Sofia / Pristina, November 20, 2001**

In a second surprise election result in Bulgaria, voters in the Sunday election run-off for the presidency removed the widely-respected President Petar STOYANOV, and put in his place the former head of the Communist party, Georgi PARVANOV, 44.

It caps an extraordinary year in Bulgaria, where the EPP's Union of Democratic Forces was ousted by a hastily-formed monarchist party: the Prime Minister is now the former king, Simeon SAXECOBURGGOTSKI, in exile since he was a small child in 1946.



Stoyanov, 49, supported by both the UDF and the new ruling party, conceded defeat in a close run-off vote in which he gained 46.7% against the winner's 53.3%. The result ended a meteoric career which had started when he shot from obscurity to the presidency in 1996. "My biggest pain is for the people who voted for me. We were just one step away from victory and I am sure they feel very dramatic about this loss," he said.

Parvanov said he was ready to work with Saxecoburggotski's government and pursue Bulgaria's aims of joining NATO and the European Union.

Elections in Kosovo, also at the weekend, brought a surprise of a different kind: in what appears to be a landmark turn, almost half of Kosovo's Serbs voted in general elections on November 17. As many as 64% of ethnic Albanians voted, while the Serbian turnout was around 47%, according to the OSCE mission.

"The Serbs should be able to build their future," said Oliver IVANOVIC, a Kosovar Serb leader.

The moderate Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) led by Ibrahim RUGOVA (*above right*) came out top - with possibly as much as 70% of the vote.

The campaign was mainly peaceful, though many Serbs were under pressure to boycott. In Kosovska Mitrovica, a northern mining town cut into ethnic Albanian and Serbian halves by a river, the bridge guards - a group of hard-liners who sprang up in 1999 to prevent ethnic Albanians from getting into "their" side of town - harassed Serbs going to vote.

In Belgrade, the Serbian Radical Party of the ultra-nationalist Vojislav

SESELJ called any participation in the election "an open betrayal." But Zajedno, the loose alliance that now governs Serbia, invited Serbs to vote in the elections. The new parliament will have 120 seats, of which 10 will be given to Serbs automatically, and another 10 to the other ethnic minorities in the province. Those minorities would also receive seats from the 100 that are elected by proportional representation - 1% of the national vote is equivalent to one seat in parliament.

The Serbs might get up to 16 seats and other minorities around 12, according to preliminary results. Rugova's LDK will have approximately 45 seats, PDK about 26, and AAK approximately eight seats, according to exit polls.

The independence issue is still the province's Achilles' heel. Though technically part of Yugoslavia, Kosovo became a *de facto* UN protectorate in July 1999, after NATO's bombing campaign against former President Slobodan MILOSEVIC's Yugoslavia. Most of the 1.7 million Albanians - who constitute around 90% of Kosovo's population - strongly favour independence; the province's Serbs want a gradual return to Yugoslavia.

At a press conference, Rugova said that independence had to be addressed by the international community. "Formal independence, which I demand from the international community, is something that should come today or tomorrow," Rugova said. The LDK leader, 56, appears to be more trusted by ethnic Albanians than the PDK's Hashim THACI, the former political leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) guerrillas, or Rramush HARADINAJ of the AAK, a former regional UCK commander.

Rugova said he will include two seats in the government for minorities and added that he "may discuss whether to include adversaries in the government as well." Thaci said he would be prepared to talk about a coalition government with Rugova.

But many Serbs are worried that the new parliament is the first step toward outright independence.

"The election will lead to the creation of an Albanian state [in Kosovo], and we were given no guarantees of safety, security, and justice," said Milan IVANOVIC, president of the regional board of the Serbian National Council of Northern Kosovo.