
SERBIAN RULING PARTY AND OPPOSITION MEET FOR FIRST TIME

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Representatives of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party and opposition Alliance for Serbia met on Tuesday behind closed doors at the Belgrades Faculty of Political Science, in the presence of NGOs, to discuss conditions for upcoming elections.

It is a good sign that we sat down together. It is a sign that there is an awareness that there is a great need to talk, and that already means something, the dean of the faculty, Professor Dragan Simic, told media, Tanjug news agency reported.

Simic confirmed that the meeting was about the conditions for holding elections, which was one of the main objections opposition put to the ruling Progressives over several months of street protests that are still being held every Saturday in the Serbian capital.

Serbian media reported that the meeting was attended by Serbian Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic, and two MPs from the ruling Progressive Party, Vladimir Djukanovic and Vladimir Orlic.

From the opposition, the meeting was attended by leaders of the Alliance for Serbia, Dragan Djilas, Zoran Lutovac, Miroslav Aleksic, Marinika Tepic and Tomislav Zigmanov.

According to Simic, the meeting was initiated by the Open Society Foundation. Media reported that the meeting was also attended by other NGOs.

The Alliance for Serbia stressed in a press release afterwards that these were not negotiations between the authorities and the opposition.

It said that it would respect the request of the organisers that the discussions between the participants at the meeting not be made public.

The executive director of the Open Society Foundation, Milan Antonijevic, told BIRN that the meeting was held in a constructive atmosphere and said there would be another meeting soon.

Although the participants didnt make any statements about the specifics of what was discussed, MP Vladimir Djukanovic criticised opposition leaders for inviting some media to the meeting.

The gathering was organised as a presentation by [Serbian NGOs] CeSid and CRTA about electoral legislation. Not negotiations and similar nonsense, Djukanovic wrote on Twitter.

But it is obvious that the gentleman from the Alliance for Serbia had the goal of politicising the event and despite the rules of the moderator they invited media, he added.

He said that he would not have attended the meeting if knew that the opposition would invite media.

Opposition parties have continued their weekly 1 of 5 Million protests against the government led by the Progressive Party each Saturday evening for months, despite the fact that numbers attending have dropped.

The key demands are measures to stop suspected abuse of the electoral roll and public resources in election campaigns, better control of the election process and campaigns, plus criminal sanctions for those who abuse the process.

1 of 5 Million sent a press release to media after the meeting on Tuesday, saying that opposition representatives demonstrated that they are open to dialogue.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has announced that regular parliamentary, provincial and local elections will be held in March or April next year.

Some opposition politicians have already been speculating about the possibility of boycotting the elections as a continuation of their refusal to participate in the work of Serbian institutions. They are already not attending sessions of parliament.

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