

## **Ivanic Bows to Western Pressure**

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West forces new Bosnian Serb premier to make changes to his new cabinet

Republika Srpska's progressive prime minister Mladen Ivanic found himself in trouble last week when he was forced to make changes to his week-old government.

Ivanic's moderate allies in the Bosnian state parliament, the Sarajevo-based 'Alliance for Change', accused him of 'smuggling' nationalistic hardliners into his cabinet. For the same reason, the international community has threatened to pull financial aid for RS.

Both are opposed to the appointment of Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, affiliates to the RS government.

Prior to the November general elections, foreign diplomats had repeatedly warned Ivanic that financial aid to RS would be withdrawn if he appointed members of the nationalist SDS, the party set up by Radovan Karadzic.

But Ivanic felt obliged to involve the SDS which had won the majority of RS votes in the November ballot. Indeed, without SDS support, as his RS coalition partners, he wouldn't have been appointed prime minister.

In the end, however, Ivanic bowed to international pressure - the only openly declared member of the SDS, Goran Popovic, was replaced as Minister for Trade and Tourism by Zeljko Tadic.

The problem is no-one knows exactly how many SDS affiliates are in the cabinet.

Immediately after the government was announced, Milorad Dodik, head of the opposition Party of Independent Social Democrats, SNSD, in RS claimed that seven other ministers had secret connections with the SDS.

He also claimed that another minister was until recently a member of the ultra-nationalist Serb Radical Party in RS.

The Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje* counted four 'hidden' SDS members. The Onasa news agency three.

Ivanic struck back, saying that Popovic was the only minister belonging to the SDS. He backed this up by insisting that the other 17 members of his cabinet came from his Party of Democratic Progress, PDP, independent experts and the Socialist Party of RS, SPRS.

The new prime minister had found himself trying to assuage both the international community and his own electorate. By appointing Popovic, he had hoped the West would accept a 'symbolic' SDS participation.

But the international community remained concerned. The office of Wolfgang Petritsch, UN High Representative in Bosnia, said it was still checking the other ministers' "cv's".

Adverse reaction to nationalist participation has left the position of Defence Minister vacant. The day before Ivanic presented his new government, Petritsch informed him in a secret meeting of his opposition to the appointment of the SPRS's Petar Djokic.

According to the High Commissioner's criteria, Djokic's views were too pro-Milosevic for such a critical position.

Ivanic's allies in Sarajevo have been explicit about SDS participation.

Leader of the Social Democratic Party, SDP, and a member of the opposition bloc Alliance for Change, Zlatko Lagumdžija, said that "to be a Serbian patriot in Bosnia today should mean supporting an RS government free of the SDS."

The Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina, SBH, led by Haris Silajdzic said Ivanic had "consciously deceived the democratic public in Bosnia and abroad, thus facilitating the introduction of nationalist policies by the SDS."

Ivanic claimed that he had formed RS's first multi-ethnic government. He has already appointed 65-year-old Bosnian Muslim Fuad Turalic to the post of Minister for Foreign Economic Relations. And now he is promising that a significant number of deputy-minister positions would go to other non-Serbs.

But some dismissed his move as only a token measure. Zekerijah Osmic from the SDP said "one minister cannot represent multi-ethnicity".

Ivanic also faces criticism at home. SDS supporters claim that he is acting undemocratically in failing to appoint the appropriate number of posts for the party, which gained most of the Bosnian Serb votes in the November elections.

Former prime minister Dodik has been careful in avoiding direct attacks on Ivanic, focusing his criticism on the SDS instead. He has accused the party both of complicity in war crimes as well as betraying Serbian interests.

Believing that the SDS/PDP coalition will fall apart, he sees an opportunity in replacing the SDS in the coalition with his own SNSD.

Dodik has publicly stated that half of the current SDS leadership should be brought to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

At the same time, Dodik, for years a favourite of the international community, has tried to portray himself as a bigger patriot than the SDS. He recently attacked the party for betraying RS by accepting Bosnian state symbols in the parliament.

It was the dire state of the RS economy that forced Ivanic to give into international pressure. Ivanic has inherited a precarious economic situation: 40 per cent unemployment, a slump in industrial production and a high budget deficit.

Additionally, government revenue has dropped, cutting the budget by \$750,000 a month. If the situation continues it would take RS more than 16 years to pay off its current budget deficit of \$150 million.

Added to this is the \$3.4 billion domestic and foreign debt. First installments of Western credit pay-offs are due this year to the tune of \$81 million.

Ivanic has, so far, played a shrewd political game. His removal of Popovic and his support for the moderate Alliance for Change has, for the moment, diffused international concerns.

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