

- Serbia Begins its Two-Day Referendum

Contributed by News Desk
Saturday, 28 October 2006
Last Updated Saturday, 28 October 2006

Belgrade, 28 October 2006 - KosovoNews - After weeks of being targeted by a furious government sponsored media campaign that went as far as sending SMS messages from to individuals, citizens of Serbia with the right to vote will have a chance to vote for or against the new Serbian constitution. The new document would define Serbia as an independent state for the first time since 1918 and replace the constitution of former dictator Slobodan Milosevic, drafted in 1990 as Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, but it also contradicts itself by declaring Kosovo an integral part of Serbia and not allowing Kosovo's non-Serb residents to vote on it.

If voters from among the 2 million pro-independence ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo were to participate, it would eliminate any chances of the draft getting the required majority approval. Belgrade's failure to invite Kosovo Albanians to vote is "senseless and wrong," said Vladimir Goati of the Transparency Serbia group. "Leaving Albanians out shows Serbia doesn't care about them," he said. In addition, the fact that the government wants the referendum to be completed in two days instead of one shows that they are fearful that they will not get the necessary number of yes votes for the constitution to be accepted.

The republican elections commission estimated that overall, about 4.15% of the eligible voters have voted before 10:00 across Serbia (excluding Kosovo).

According to the republican elections commission, there are 6,639,385 eligible voters in Serbia. This excludes the Albanian population in Kosovo, whose right to vote has been denied.

The Kosovo's Parliament has labeled this referendum as a Constitutional Aggression of Kosovo by Serbia. However, there are 265 poll stations open in Kosovo, and the Kosovo Police Force and KFOR forces are making sure that no incidents occur.

Voting centers in Novi Sad (Vojvodina province capital) opened on time as well. Politicians in that area were divided on their decisions to call voters to go to the polls. Parliament speaker Bojan Kostres in Serbia's northern Vojvodina province has called for a referendum boycott, claiming that it focuses too much on Kosovo, failing to grant sufficient autonomy to Vojvodina, Serbia's breadbasket and richest region.

Serbian president Boris Tadic declared that the new constitution is a discontinuation of Milosevic's policies, it is better than the previous one and there will be time to fix everything that may not be perfect in it.

PM Vojislav Kostunica declared that with the new constitution, the "citizenship" of Serbia is marked. He added that Serbia is entering calmer, more stable chapters of its history. "All of those who are voting today are not only participating, but they are making the new era of the Serbian history" he concluded.