

EU welcomes pro-European forces winning Serbia polls

The European Union (EU) has welcomed the 'clear victory' of the pro-European forces in Serbian parliamentary elections and promised to advance the country's path towards eventual membership of the bloc.

In a statement issued late Sunday on behalf of all 27 member states, the Slovenian presidency of the EU said it 'warmly welcomes the clear victory of pro-European forces at the Serbian general elections'.

Noting that the vote had taken place in a peaceful and orderly manner, and that a first assessment showed it to be free and democratic, the presidency said it hoped Serbia's new government would be composed with a 'clear European agenda'.

'Provided that the necessary conditions are met ... this should enable Serbia to advance further on its EU path, including the candidate status,' it added.

The spokeswoman for the EU's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, also said the result of the vote showed that the people of Serbia had given 'a clear victory to the pro-EU parties'.

'We look forward to work closely with a new government formed on this new mandate,' said Cristina Gallach.

According to preliminary results, a pro-European coalition led by President Boris Tadic won the most votes, claiming 39 percent of the ballots cast, overtaking the ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party as the largest group in parliament.

Projections suggested that another pro-European group, the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP), won 5.2 percent of the votes, qualifying for parliament.

The anti-Western bloc of the opposition Radicals (SRS) and the outgoing Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) were the big losers on the night, tallying 28 and 11.5 percent of the votes respectively.

The EU had approved a number of initiatives in recent weeks aimed at rallying support for Serbia's pro-European forces.

These included the signing of a pre-membership Stabilization and Association Agreement and the easing of visa fees.

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