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Serbia Sets Parliamentary Elections for May

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BELGRADE, Serbia — Serbia's president on Tuesday called for parliamentary elections for May 6.

The government that emerges is expected to take Serbia into talks on joining the EU, which would be a setback for Russia, a longtime Serbian ally.

After years of bitter rivalry, Serbia's two main parties may join forces to push through the reforms needed to eventually join the European Union.

But past events suggest that horse-trading over a new coalition government will take months.

President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party, the largest partner in Serbia's ruling coalition, trails the opposition Serbian Progressive Party of Tomislav Nikolic in polls, but neither is likely to claim a majority in parliament to govern alone.

Analysts say Tadic's party has a better chance of finding coalition partners than Nikolic's.

“The next government will have to take tough and complicated decisions to secure a better future for the citizens,” Tadic said.

Nikolic was formerly leader of the hard-line nationalist Serbian Radical Party but broke away in 2008, embracing EU integration and taking most of the party’s supporters with him.

He served as an observer in Russia’s presidential election last week and told The Moscow Times that he was glad Prime Minister Vladimir Putin won.

His comments downplaying accusations that Putin had stolen the election through fraud stood in distinct contrast with those of most other European observers.

Nikolic is viewed as Russia’s preferred candidate, but experts told The Moscow Times that the pull of the EU would force Nikolic toward finding common cause with Europe rather than Russia.

Serbia hopes the EU will open accession talks by the end of 2012.

Nevertheless, it faces years of tough negotiations before actually joining, and it will come under pressure to make further concessions regarding its acceptance of an independent Kosovo.

(Reuters, MT)

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