

Bosnia and Herzegovina: a stalemate over the census

On 29 July the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not adopt the law on the census. Due to the fact that the party of Bosnian Serbs boycotted this parliamentary session, it was not possible to gather the quorum. This may make it impossible to run the census in 2011, which is one of the conditions for the continuation of the integration process of BiH with the EU.

The last census was held in Bosnia just before the outbreak of the war and its results do not reflect the present ethnic make-up of the country. EU representatives have been calling on the BiH authorities to hold a census for several years. The method of holding the census is however the subject of fierce disputes among representatives of ethnic communities in BiH. The most important party that represents Bosnian Serbs – the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats(SNSD) – is seeking to include questions about the ethnic origins in the census questionnaire, possibly also about the professed religion. Bosnian and Croatian parties were opposed to that idea as they claimed that before the completion of the process of returning refugees it would legalise the domination of the Serbian population in areas where ethnic cleansing was conducted.

The census bill submitted to parliament constituted a compromise elaborated by Bosnian and Croatian parties. Although optional questions about ethnic origins and religion were included in the bill in order to meet the demands of the Serbian party, a reservation was also made that the results of the census would not affect the division of positions in the state's authorities.

The Serbian SNSD blocked the bill by boycotting the vote on it. Due to the parliamentary break and the election scheduled for 3 October this year, it is quite unlikely that the law will be adopted early enough to make it possible to conduct the census in 2011. <MarSz>