

SERBIA RE-ELECTS BORIS TADIC AND APPROACHES EU



Serbia - The re-election of the Serbian President Tadic "provides confidence that Serbia will continue its course towards the European Union," according to Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen.

Serbia's pro-Western President, Boris Tadic, has won a second round election run-off against nationalist challenger Tomislav Nikolic, who admitted defeat.

Mr Tadic was re-elected by more than 50% of voters in a contest that saw a high voter turnout.

Car horns could be heard around Belgrade as Mr Tadic's supporters took to the streets of the Serbian capital to celebrate the victory.

The election was seen as a referendum on Serbia's relations with Europe.

"Serbia has shown its great democratic potential," Mr Tadic said in his victory speech.

He lauded Mr Nikolic for his performance in the knife-edge contest, and said the country still had hard work ahead.

The European Union's Slovenian presidency welcomed the result of this poll.

"The EU wishes to deepen its relationship with Serbia and to accelerate its progress towards the EU, including candidate status," it said in a statement.

Serbia's electoral commission said Mr Tadic had secured 51% of the votes compared to Mr Nikolic's 47% in a closely monitored election.

In Belgrade, Mr Tadic's backers - many waving Serbian and EU flags - celebrated the victory with fireworks.

"This president will lead us to Europe, for which we can hardly wait," a supporter said.

Admitting defeat at his party's headquarters, Mr Nikolic congratulated his opponent, but added:

"My message to the EU is to stop blackmailing Serbia and stop putting impossible conditions, that we are ready to be within the EU, but there are some conditions we cannot fulfil."

His comment was an apparent reference to EU pressure on Serbia to accept Kosovo's independence. Both candidates argued against independence for the largely ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo.

The election had been seen as a fundamental choice for the country, which has yet to fully shake off the isolation of the 1990s.

Serbia is widely seen as key to the stability of the western Balkan region.