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|  | **UNMIK/FR/0055/01FEATURE RELEASE - 6 July 2001** **OSCE Elections - As Political Parties Prepare to Certify,Their Political Platforms are Emerging**By Alexandra GeorgeParties competing in Kosovo's first ever province-wide Assembly elections are already gearing up for the electoral campaign. As Kosovo Albanian, Serb, Turkish, Bosniac and other political parties prepare to certify in order to participate, their members are formulating their platforms on political, economic and social issues.From UNMIK's perspective it is already a positive development that the main parties are defining their positions on relevant issues rather than, as in the local elections last year, merely vying for attention with, at that point, irrelevant demands for independence. In other words, the immense effort by the institution-building Pillar of the Admnistration, OSCE, seems to be paying off. For one major party, economic issues will take priority both in the campaign and in the Assembly, in particular restructuring of socially-owned and state enterprises with a view of attracting foreign investment. In this way, much-needed new jobs will be created.Another major party's platform represents a commitment to building democratic institutions and deepening the independence process. Its economic platform will stress support to small and medium businesses to create a free market, and also transformation of socially-owned enterprises (SOEs) into private concerns. The main lesson learned from the 2000 municipal elections for this party was its inexperience in electoral campaigning. The party will put more efforts into making more direct contacts with the electorate, in part through more TV time, as well as radio advertising and public information. Currently the party is identifying candidates, which will comprise younger people.One party that expects to win between 15 to 22 seats this time is stressing priority for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).  Noting that the banking sector is not developed enough to finance the SME sector in a major way, it is calling for a vastly improved security situation in order to attract foreign investors. That party also thinks agro-business and ferrous and nickel factories, part of Trepca, could potentially draw foreign investors. In the field of education two major parties want university reform and more opportunity for students to study in Europe.  One of them wants vocational schools to be established to provide professions for school graduates.  A third party "wants a reformed school system fully compatible with that of Western Europe so that we can face economic and technological challenges," its spokesman says.Some parties think they have a strategic advantage simply from having been in opposition these past nine months since they have not been responsible for local governance.Already the parties are touring villages and municipalities to identify problems people are facing: "In the 2000 elections we made the mistake of ignoring the villages," one admits.  If it wins, the party plans  to provide for 7,000 war orphans in Kosovo and to assist the most vulnerable groups, including pensioners.  Waiting for the signal…On the Kosovo Serb side, one Leposavic party leader is still looking to Belgrade to give an official nod to register and participate in the elections. If Belgrade does so, then the international community should show its goodwill and implement all the conditions in 1244, he said.  Three Kosovo-wide Serbian parties would form a coalition, he said.  This could increase to four.Despite UNMIK's efforts in Belgrade and with the Kosovo parties, doubts remain. One Kosovo Serb leader is preparing to register, but the question of participating in the elections is still undecided: "If we said 'No, we won't participate,' we would be sending a message to the world that we are isolationist.  By registering we are signaling our presence in Kosovo, and prepared to participate in political life, but we want our concerns addressed," she told UNMIK Direct.  Her participation in the elections themselves depends on  signals from the Serbian Prime-Minister Zoran Djindjic, as well as from FRY President Kostunica. It is important for UNMIK and the international community, which will watch every step of Kosovo's first province-wide election, that there are signs that multi-ethnicity is becoming politically acceptable. Internationals are accordingly encouraged when one Serbian party leader argues that Kosovo Albanians should be included in the democratic process in Serbia, whilst Kosovo Serbs should take part in the one in Kosovo - "Thus together both communities should be included in a future international process.  Any groups that opt for discrimination and isolation are treading on the wrong path," he said. One leader thinks UNMIK has not done enough for the Serbs, especially in regard "to freedom of movement, as well as the Constitutional Framework, which does not give any rights for the Serb community." Her party respects the fact that the Albanians are the majority in Kosovo, the question is not about the number of seats in the Assembly. "Albanians were afraid of the Serb government so now I would like the Albanians to 055respect the fear of the Serbs after mid-1999."   Note for editors The full document may be consulted online in English at <http://www.unmik.org/>. Albanian and Serbian versions can be provided. For a selection of photographs, please contact Mr Ky Chung at 038 504-604 ext. 5467 |