

A HANDS-ON EXPERIMENT, WITH ELECTRONIC VOTING, IN CONSENSUS

A Proportional All-party Power-sharing Grand Coalition Government of National Unity / Razmerjana, sve-stranačna, moć-dijeliša, koalicija, vlada narodnog jedinstva

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General information:

The eighth international seminar is organized in co-operation with the Dept. of Comparative Politics and the Rokkan Centre, Univ. of Bergen, Norway, and supported by the Project *The Politics of Democratic and Welfare Development in South Eastern Europe: A Network for Research and Education*, backed by the Center for International Univ. Cooperation and the Norwegian Research Council, Oslo.

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Location: Cultural House, Konjic, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Although there is no set deadline for the submission of papers, we encourage you to apply as soon as possible.

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<http://www.rokkan.uib.no/bihdemocracy/>

The western world is obsessed with the majority vote. When it comes to electoral systems, people argue about German, French and Irish systems, about proportionality and gender quotas, and so on. On decision-making, however, most believe, think, or just assume, that democracy is majority rule, and that, ergo, decisions must be taken by a majority vote. In most parliaments, they use simple majority voting. On some constitutional matters, they prefer weighted majorities. In the EU, they have qualified majority voting. In plural societies like Belgium, twin majority voting is used. But the question is always a stark choice, a dichotomy, a win-or-lose contest between option A and option B.

Democracy, however, is meant to be for everybody, and the democratic process should allow for a meeting of minds, if not indeed, the collective wisdom. This cannot be facilitated by a majority vote. Indeed, the opposite is the case, and »svi su ratovi u bivšoj Jugoslaviji počeli nekim referendumom [glasanje većina]« [»...all the wars in the former Yugoslavia started with a referendum (a majority vote)«] (*Oslobodjenje*, 07.02.1999). The common consensus can be identified, however, via a multi-option preference vote.

A power-sharing administration can best work if it does so in consensus. This can be achieved, sometimes (albeit slowly), by talking and talking and talking until... or, at most times (and rather more quickly), by a multi-option preference vote. To show how this works, the conference will split up into four separate groups to discuss a most important question: how should the future of Bosnia be decided? If Dayton is to be re-written, then, by whom? With what, if any, open public participation? Under what, if any, guidance? Subject to what, if any, international norms?

On returning to a plenary session, the various options will be collated and displayed via a data projector onto a computer screen. These will then be summarised into a short list of options, a ballot paper will be run off, and then everyone will cast their preferences on these various options. The votes cast will be fed into the computer and analysed, so to identify that option which best represents »the will of the people«, or at least, »the will of those voting«. This first experiment will conclude with a brief analysis of this decision-making process.

Finally, the conference will carry out a second experiment. Participants will be asked to consider themselves to be members of the *House of the Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation BiH* and, from a given list of its 80 members, to choose an executive of 15 ministers in which every appointee will serve in the portfolio to which, in the consensus of those voting, he/she is most suited. This matrix vote is both preferential and proportional, and it allows for the election of a balanced executive, without any use of party, religious or sectarian labels.

If successful, the experiments will show that a power-sharing executive can best work, if it is elected by this inclusive process, and if it takes all its non-urgent decisions in verbal or vital consensus.