

V.I.P. Daily News Report

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ANALYSIS

Tadic's Dilemma: To Go to Presidential, Parliamentary Elections at the Same Time, or Not

The unexpected reactivation of the issue on possibility that the presidential elections could take place at the same time with the parliamentary ones, in late April, or in early May – just a day before the European Union should make a decision whether Serbia will be granted the EU country-member candidate status or not – on Wednesday revived speculations what the election strategy of the President Boris Tadic and his Democratic Party (DS) would be.

It has already been certain that the presidential elections would take place this year, so the dilemma whether these should take place at the same time with the parliamentary elections is not a new one at all; *V.I.P.* wrote about that possibility last year. However, it seemed for a while that people close to Tadic were rather relaxed about that as well as that the DS more or less does not care whether the presidential elections will take place in May, or in late 2012; or at least they have tried to make that impression in public.

But, it seems that the constant deterioration of economic and social situation in the country, and a constant lagging in relation to the opposition Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in all surveys conducted has made the DS leadership nervous and forced Tadic and his team to reconsider what is the best option for them.

The timing of launching the possibility that the presidential elections could take place at the same time with the parliamentary ones is interesting in its own right. Diverting of the public's attention to this important issue just a day before the key decision of the EU on Serbia should be made seems awkward. It will inescapably distract a portion of the public from something that - at least in government-controlled media - should be the major issue.

It is also interesting who was the one who told to the public that the presidential elections could take place in spring. It has been done by Vojvodina DS board head Dusan Elezovic, who gave an interview to Novi Sad-based *Dnevnik* daily; he is considered to have become - although the general public outside Vojvodina actually has not heard much about him - Tadic's key man in the Serbian northern province. As Belgrade press reported in December 2011, Elezovic took a complete control over the DS in Vojvodina, thus limited influence of the ambitious Vojvodina Prime Minister Bojan Pajtic, even though Pajtic is a DS deputy leader. (see *V.I.P. No. 4760, 4761*)

Elezovic, admittedly, lost no time in order to relativize the previous statement by issuing a new one during the day, saying that his statement was not interpreted precisely, and also voicing his expectation that the presidential elections would take place in December after all. (He didn't actually deny anything he previously said.) But, this will not remove an impression that Tadic and the DS leadership have a serious dilemma what they should do.

The first option is the presidential and the parliamentary elections not to take place at the same time. The risk of this option, however, is that in the event that the DS was not among the parties that would set up a new government after the parliamentary elections, the party would be overwhelmed by *ressentiment* and would get into crisis over management and motivation issues. From that sort of position it would be hard to motivate party apparatus and grassroots activists to agitate for Tadic in late 2012. All the more so because a defeat of the DS at the parliamentary elections would be unavoidably perceived as a personal defeat of Tadic, due to which in the time till the presidential elections he would be faced with revived attempts of his party rivals to replace him. Even if he politically survived that internal war, it is a big question if Tadic would manage to win at the elections that should take place soon after.

The second option is both the parliamentary and the presidential elections to take place at the same time. In theory, the advantage of this option for the DS should be the belief that Tadic's rating is always a little bit better than the rating of his party, so the party could count on better result than it would be if the only elections that takes place in May were the parliamentary ones. But, just like any other political calculation, this one is also potentially dubious. Over the time Tadic's popularity has dropped, just like popularity of the DS, and there are no guarantees that the synergy effect of the simultaneous holding of the parliamentary and the presidential elections will significantly improve the DS' chances. And the only thing that will be worse for the DS than to lose at the parliamentary elections is to lose the presidential elections at the same time with the parliamentary ones.

The third option seems far-fetched, but the sources of *V.I.P.* say that it should not be completely discarded. According to that idea, only the parliamentary elections will take place this spring; after that a government would be set up which would not be too much stable, and the DS - either from the inside, or from the outside - would be capable to overthrow it in fall, which then should create conditions the parliamentary elections to be repeated and to take place at the same time as the presidential elections. Alternatively, and depending on the results of the

elections, setting of the government up could be dragged out for so long that eventually all deadlines envisaged by the constitution would be exceeded and everything could result in repeating of the parliamentary and the presidential elections at the same time. Thus, the third option would boil down to a sub-option of the second one.

However, all of these calculations are not much good until the outcome of the parliamentary elections is known – and at that time some of the options and sub-options will not be possible to carry out any longer. For the time being, for all surveys demonstrate it, it is realistic to expect that the SNS will be stronger than the DS anyways, but it will be as much important to see how big the margin between the two strongest parties will be in percentages. If the SNS won with a margin of 5-6%, then it could be expected that the DS would do everything in its power to outwit the SNS, gather enough partners around the party and set up a government again. But, if the SNS won with an almost two digit percent margin, such a maneuver would be more difficult to conduct, because the SNS also has potential to make a coalition.

Anyway, the DS will not give up the power easily and go into opposition without fight: the party members, top to bottom, find it difficult even to imagine living without privileges and power they have been enjoying for years. The forthcoming months will be filled with embittered struggle for redistribution of that power.