

V.I.P. Daily News Report

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COMMENTARY

Tadic Tries to Make Use of International Support to Make DS Elections Prospects Better

Position and reputation of Serbia in the world and Europe once again have become one of the most important arguments in the election campaign for the parliamentary elections that will take place on May 6.

On the one hand the Democratic Party (DS) led by the Serbian President Boris Tadic has been making use of getting the EU member-country candidate status as its key argument to make voters to vote for them, and it is one of the arguments that, according to them, confirms that the governing coalition has passed the exam of successful governing. Central figure of this campaign is Tadic himself.

DS underestimates its biggest rivals at the elections - the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) - whose leaders the DS describes as incapable and inexperienced to lead the country, particularly in the domain of the foreign policy and the Euro-integration process. Even the Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac, who is hardly observed as an Euro-integration process expert, said that the opposition is "not familiar with the European values."

According to Sutanovac, the parties in Serbia could be divided in three groups – the first one, which sincerely wants to take the country into Europe (the parties of the governing coalition); the second one, which "is insincerely for the EU" (Sutanovac means the SNS, among other parties, although it is not clear how he has determined the degree of sincerity) and the third one, which is against the EU (Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia and the Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party).

All of this one can understand considering the fact that the governing coalition must not open issues of achieved results in economic and social development and anti-corruption fight in the election campaign - because the results are poor. They cannot open the issue of Kosovo either, considering the fact that they would be condemned by the public for the agreements they have reached. They have also tried with making promises of large number of foreign investments, speeded up development of the country in the future, but the pompous and glamorous beginning over the first ten days of the campaign completely failed and the public rejected it.

Thus, the only thing left for the governing coalition is to underestimate the opposition and to praise itself for having connections among world politicians and big businessmen. Tadic and his coalition count on having a certain advantage over the opposition.

For the nth time the DS and its partners have activated the two well-known arguments in order to make the EU and the United States to back them at the elections. The first one is that the nationalism is still very present in Serbia as well as that if the West does not back Tadic and the DS the nationalists could come into power, which means that the country would go away from the EU and the NATO and the return to the crisis situation in the Balkans.

The second argument is that if the West does not back them, and if the DS loses power, Russia will have more influence on the future Serbian government. It still does work on some EU member-countries, particularly on the neighboring countries that still have bad memories on the recent history.

There is no need for much explanation that neither the one nor the other theory are correct. Serbia will neither return to the past nor will it destabilize the region if the government changes. It is difficult to even imagine that a future government would give up on the road to the EU for the simple reason that the Serbian economy is connected to EU countries to such a degree that these connections are impossible to bypass. Serbia finally doesn't have much strategic choice apart from association to the EU.

As for the Russian influence in Serbia, it can be freely said that it won't increase with the arrival of some new government comprised of the now opposition parties. It will be proportional to the interests of both countries. We should only remind that the current government had signed arrangements with Russia on the South Stream pipeline and the opening of a base for swift humanitarian interventions in Nis. Finally, one should also have in mind the good relations between the current government and Russia and the high level of agreement of Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic with Moscow. This, in itself, is not a bad thing but these facts shed light on the problem from another side. It was Tadic himself had, during the ongoing pre-election campaign, sent Jeremic to ask for a meeting with president-elect Vladimir Putin.

Seeing that the Democrats' campaign and their chief pre-election asset Tadic is not going well among the impoverished Serbs tired of great words and promises, it remains for Tadic to greet foreign guests, such as for instance, the Austrian President Heinz Fischer last week; or to, as this week, travel to get his award in Lisbon and meet with the Italian Prime Minister and local businessmen in Milan. Italian companies have, after all, signed several useful business arrangements in Serbia in the past two years, usually getting money from the Serbian budget for their engagement.

Tadic's big plans to organise meetings with Putin and the US President Barack Obama have apparently failed. It is obvious that the two countries do not want to get involved in the Serbian elections. This, however, does not seem to apply to some of their colleagues in the EU.

It is interesting to notice the great engagement of the head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Vincent Degert in recent days. He frequently appears at formal openings of buildings with the leaders of the ruling coalition. Degert accompanies his appearances with optimistic statements on a soon beginning of the negotiations on Serbia's membership in the EU. This is later (ab)used by DS propaganda-makers in the pre-election campaign. It is not very good for high EU officials to be used in the pre-election campaign. Or perhaps it is an expression of the EU's standpoint in respect to the desired result of the elections in Serbia. In any case, the voters have already noticed this.

As time passes, the campaign will probably become increasingly heated. There will be more and more topics such as inter-political, especially the economic and social situation in the country and the fight against corruption above all. This is a field in which, as has already been stated, the ruling coalition and Tadic cannot brag with great results.

Within the DS-led bloc they are self-confident and believe that they will succeed to, after the elections, create a coalition similar to the current one, perhaps without Mladjan Dinkic and his URS, but with the Liberal Democratic Party of Cedomir Jovanovic. For the time being, it seems that there will be no simultaneous holding of presidential elections since it is the estimate, of at least one part of the DS, that Tadic is helping them the most with his international activities. And Tadic himself is thinking mostly about himself and the presidential elections awaiting him by the end of the year. The party is to him in second place.

In any event, one should first wait for the results of the parliamentary elections. Perhaps the results will bring some kind of different division of forces on the political scene which will have as a result a different make-up of the ruling coalition and some new faces among the ministers.