

ANOTHER ELECTION BALLOT ON THE SIXTH OF MAY

If all pre-electoral promises that Serbian politicians have been giving to the citizens in the first month of the campaign for local and parliamentary elections come true – after the sixth of May 2012 Serbia is going to be the land of felicity, in which there is no criminal nor corruption, where politicians do not steal and work for the wellbeing of citizens, country where no one will pay the bills, where there will not be a need for work but everyone will have as much as they need, just like in the book 'Utopia' by Thomas More. The unrealistic promises of the politicians in electoral campaigns are not something that is specific for Serbia only, because it happens in all democratic countries throughout the elections. Still, it seems that during more of two decades of renewed parliamentarianism in Serbia, politicians have never given more promises to the citizens and at the same time have never cared less whether their promises are real. It tells a lot about the current situation that Serbian society and political parties are facing with.

Superficial analysis of Serbian political parties' electoral promises shows quite clearly that in this electoral campaign in Serbia are going to dominate economic topics. It is logical if we know that according to one relevant public opinion' survey from February, 46 per cent of citizens in Serbia named unemployment as the greatest problem in the society. 8 per cent of citizens stressed 'low living standard' and 'corruption' and 'economy' as the biggest problems and 4,5 per cent only named the problem of Kosovo. Political parties in their campaigns 'listen' to people and thus in this electoral campaign in Serbia there is so much of economy. The citizens are promised new jobs, investments, strong regions, truth, honesty...

Thus, based on what could be heard at the beginning of the campaign, it can be concluded that the economic topics will be ahead of political. From topics, in campaign prevails economy, struggle against criminal and corruption, the European Union and Kosovo. It is interesting that Serbian political parties differ one from another in the questions of foreign and domestic policy while there are almost no differences in the questions of economy. So it is possible to find in Serbia parties that are for example great advocates of entering of Serbia into the European Union (EU), as well as those which are fiery opponents of Euro-integrations but the economic programmes of all parties are almost identical. It is really odd that almost the same economic measures are announced by parties that are of the left wing as well as of the right wing?

The governing coalition 'Choice for better life – Boris Tadić', headed by the Democratic Party (DS) of the president Boris Tadić offers to the voters – 'jobs', 'investments' and 'safety'. The slogan of this coalition 'A European step, good for everyone' clearly emphasizes where it strives and what promises the Democratic Party (DS). This message speaks in terms of the fact that the base of this campaign of this coalition is a trial to on the elections capitalise the fact that Serbia got in March this year the European Union membership status candidate which is considered to be the success of the Democratic Party.



The leading democrates in their messages to the citizens of Serbia promise that they will 'solve the actual problems' that 'the new government is going to be small, efficient and anti-crisis', that 'food producers are going to get stimulative means from the budget whether they paid contributions to the pension security or not' that they will encourage 'self-employment and small family enterprises', that 'every agricultural producer is going to have right on different subsidies, the encouraging of the export', that the citizens will 'be guaranteed the stability of prices of oil and sugar' and that 'Serbia is going to get the guarantee fund for women who are starting their own business' and that the 'task of the Democratic Party is to save the working places'.

All messages of the leading democrates are economic. It is interesting that the promises are rather generalised in comparison to the 2008. campaign when that party won the elections triumphally. The democrates then promised 'to abolish the tax when buying the first apartment', 'one hundred euros of donation per hectare of farm land to every agricultural laborer' as well as abolishing the tax on buying computers. That year the elections were won with the political message 'both Europe and Kosovo' as well as with small and concretely electoral economic promises. Today in their messages there is no Kosovo and economic messages are more general. The leading democrates want the voters to believe they only the democrates guarantee them stability, safety, better standard, new working places and personal prosperity. If they manage in convincing them in that – they are going to win. The campaign of this coalition has been formed in a way that voters can gain the impression that the party has got a plan how to lead Serbia in the following period. The creators of the campaign, the Democratic Party, know quite well that voters like to hear the plan from the politician, no matter if they agree with that person or not. However, the problem with the Democratic Party campaign is that sometimes it resembles the campaign of the oppositional party struggling for the government and not of the party that has been governing Serbia in the previous four years. That is why some messages sound unconvincing.

The greatest opponent to the leading democrates is the oppositional Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) whose leader Tomislav Nikolić will most likely be the candidate opponent to president Boris Tadić at early presidential elections that are scheduled today.

The messages of the progressives (public name for the Serbian Progressive Party) as well as the messages of the leading democrates are economic. The oppositional progressives have been promising to the citizens that their 'goal is developing small and medium enterprises, encouraging of small business and economists', that they are going to 'enable more working places', that they are going to 'improve business ambience and provide conditions for investing', that they are going to 'reform public sector and tax policy', 'abolish paying fees because today there are 104 different fees for companies', that they are going to 'engage that VAT should be computed on 30 days and paid on 60 days', to 'reduce bureaucracy', to 'provide better conditions of living for the officers and their families', to 'open the office for quick answers', to 'enact new Law about public supplies' claiming that it is positively marked in the European Union, that they 'invest most in country and children.'



Still, what attracts most attention was their promise that 'in the following ten years they will provide 100 billion of foreign investments' as well as that they will 'connect Serbia with the Aegean Sea' (they revived the idea of channel that would connect rivers Danube, Great Morava and Vardar with the Aegean Sea.)

It is interesting that neither the progressives nor the democrates do not mention political topics in their electoral messages as well as Kosovo. Nikolić and his deputy Aleksandar Vučić travelled to Germany during the campaign. Often travelings of the leader of Progressives abroad have the purpose to send message to the voters that progressives can cooperate with all countries, that good relations with the world and attracting of the investments are not the exclusiveness of the Democratic Party. There exactly lies the key of their success on the elections. If they manage to defend themselves from the trials of the democrates to present the electoral struggle of these two parties as the fight of good and evil as the choice between war and peace, in other words, if they show to the voters that they are party which can be accepted in the European Union and finally, if they should compete with the democrates only about the economy – they are close to the success.

The Socialists Party of Serbia (SPS) headed by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Police Ivica Dačić is the only party that has not still started serious pre-electoral campaign. The socialists (public name for the Socialists Party of Serbia) as a party do not promise anything to the citizens but instead it daily does its leader Ivica Dačić. He realises that his personal ranking is above the ranking of his political party and he is aware that there are going to be held presidential elections together with local and parliamentary elections on which he is going to be a candidate. That is the reason why Dačić shows up every day in public as a Minister of Police sending to the voters only one message – that he is a determined politician. For weeks now he has been processing personal campaign which is an introduction in the only campaign this party is going to have – campaign for the president Ivica Dačić.

The oppositional and pro-european party Liberal- Democratic Party (LDP) is showing up on the elections in coalition 'Reversal' with the slogan 'The truth'. Different from leading parties that speak only about the economy this party has got political messages as well. So the liberals (public name for the Liberal Democratic Party) promise 'wider authonomy for Vojvodina through the reform of the Constitution' and 'continuing of the process of European integrations'. Other messages are also economic with this party too. Liberals are claiming to the voters that they 'will help development of agriculture' and 'change the economic policy', 'redefine the process of privatisation', ask the responsibility for 'the politicians that signed the Energetic Agreement with Russia because the citizens are paying the most expensive gas'. The impression is that this coalition did not manage to offer the voters a new kind of policy that would justify the name of the coalition – 'Reversal.' On every elections so far, the liberals and their leader Čedomir Jovanović have managed to gain some kind of success because they were different from the Democratic Party. On these elections the difference from the Democratic Party is so small that their success solely depends on how much the voters of Democratic Party are going to be satisfied with their own party considering that large number of voters of the Democratic Party as their second electoral option put the Liberal Democratic Party.

Ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party (SRS) headed by Vojislav Šešelj, who has been on trial for war crimes at the international tribunal for war crimes committed at ex-Yugoslavia in the Hague, with slogan ' I choose Serbia'. clearly put at understanding that there is no dilemma for them what they put at first place . The radicals (public name for Serbian Radical Party SRS) in every public appearance attack the European Union , however their slogans are also mostly economic. They advocate that ' all children go to the nursery without paying any fees', ' to abolish paying VAT (value added tax which in Serbia is 18 per cent) on books, students' books and school facilities', for the ' abolishing of principles of Bologna declaration and abolishing of the entrance tests for faculties' for ' the abolishing of VAT for agricultural machines, tools, seed, fertilisers and everything that is used in a process of agricultural production', for ' rigid forbiddance of import and production of genetic modified organisms (GMO)' as well as for ' imposing of customs' measures of protection of domestic agricultural production'. The radicals are asking that ' Russian capital in Serbia becomes equal with the one of western countries', that ' government guarantees the prices and repurchase ', that 'infrastructure and power investments turn to the country and specially in higher mountainous and devastated areas ' as well as to abolish ' monopolies of foreign and domestic multinational companies on Serbian market.'

It is interesting that such a nationalistic party as radicals has chosen economy as a dominant topic of their campaign. Economic messages are completely populist and are named for the voters in rural areas where this party traditionally has greater support. The curiosity of their campaign is that it is headed by young and not too affirmed representative of people Aleksandar Martinović who speaks rolling 'R' just like his leader in the Hague so there is a doubt that his choice as the most expanded in the campaign of the radicals is not accidental. Also, it can not be accidental that leader Vojislav Šešelj imprisoned in the Hague gets a lot of space on Public Service (RTS) in his appearances in front of the tribunal.

The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) of former Prime Minister of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica is the only party that has got clear political programme on these elections – political and military neutrality of Serbia. While the leader of the party Koštunica sends political messages to the voters , this party has shown understanding for the need to offer economic solutions to the voters. That is the task of agile president deputy of the party Nenad Popović who is well-known Serbian businessman. Popović has promised to the citizens ' ten billion euros of investments and credits from Russian Federation', ' double increased budget for agriculture', ' credits for agriculture labourers with ten years of amortization', ' abolishing of firms' fees and encouragement of small and medium enterprises ', ' disobliment of all contributions for new employees in the first two years for all small and medium enterprises that are opening new working places', and the 'change of Law about public supplies so that small and medium enterprises can have advantage at tenders.' At the appearance of this party in front of the public there are noticed certain changes in comparison to previous elections. While in the past in public used to appear only the leader of the party Vojislav Koštunica with the political topics now it is notable that economy is important part of the campaign. It is noticeable that the economic programme party is offering coordinates with the political – political and military neutrality of the country.

Besides, it is interesting that Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) in Belgrade leads completely different campaign under the most noticeable slogan on these elections – ' cornflower'. In that campaign the candidate of the party for the mayor Aleksandar Popović does not almost mention the party, his messages are different and even colours on electoral materials are different from the colours of the Democratic Party of Serbia.

The United Regions of Serbia (URS) of former Deputy Prime Minister Mladjan Dinkić through a slogan ' Strong regions – strong Serbia.' express their tendency for decentralisation of the country. In the campaign Dinkić's party deals only with the economy besides the regionalisation. They promise ' paying of the VAT for the companies only after paying of invoices', 'support to the old people households,' ' adjusting of educational system to the needs of economy', ' steady development of traffic infrastructure as to all regions in Serbia can have equal chances for attracting the investments and economic development', and the abolishing of ' numerous parafiscal fees and the reform of VAT '. Dinkić has better than other leaders felt that citizens consider that one can not get the job if the applicant is not a member of a political party. That is why he initiated the action named ' stop partocracy' in which he asks other party leaders to sign the obligation that ' in public enterprises will not be employed party's members'. Besides, that party promises that ' it will impose professionalisation of work in public enterprises.' The abolishing of board of directors in public enterprises', ' the possibility of deposing of directors before the end of mandate in case of non fulfilling the predicted business plan .' Dinkić's party also promises to ' decreasing of bureaucracy', ' the abolition of unnecessary procedures', 'maintainance of tax reforms', ' the support to small and medium enterprises.'

Dinkić's party is the most concrete in electoral promises because their leader is trully master of electoral campaigns. He is able to recognise what people want and to immediately start an action and create politics out of it. The problem with this campaign lies in the fact that for the first time Dinkić does not have the state on his side. During the previous campaign as a minister he was sending letters to citizens in which he informed them that they would get free actions of public enterprises meaning one thousand euros each. Another problem lies in the fact that in previous campaigns he was almost the only person talking about economy while other parties were dealing with political and state questions. Now everyone are talking about economy . And the third and most serious problem of Mladjan Dinkić is that he comes out as the oppositional party even though he was a part of government so his promises are not convincing. When he says ' stop parties' employment' the voters can ask him why he did not stop it while he was the government. Finally, it is noticeable that by the campaign of ' attracting the foreign investments' the governing Democratic Party with President Tadić took over his campaign. Until now Dinkić was in his electoral campaigns going from factory to factory and was sending economic messages to the voters. Today Boris Tadić is doing that. The problem with the campaign of the regions is that it is not convincing even though we must agree it is intense. Still, despite all aggravating circumstances , because of all previous experiences with him , Dinkić must not be depreciated or substracted.



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Considering the beginning of the campaign, it can be expected it to be without high moral standards, dirty and very dynamic. We are entering the last month of the electoral race in which are also presidential candidates from today on, so we can expect fiery political struggle for every vote.