

DOES IT MATTER WHO IS GUILTY?

Decision of the European Union Council not to grant Serbia candidate status has caused a political crisis both in the country and the ruling Democratic Party (DS). It was anticipated that the decision would have long-term political consequences due to its importance for the future of Serbia and the fact that there's less than six months left until the parliamentary elections.

Refusal of Serbia's candidacy is not so tragic for this country - because it may be granted later - how tragic is the fact that European integration became an election theme. In such an atmosphere there are no rational decisions, which is the least necessary to Serbia.

The biggest loser of the EU Council's decision is the strongest party in the ruling coalition - the Democratic Party led by Serbian President **Boris Tadic** the trademark of which is European integration policy. Democrats have lead the country independently since 2008 when they won the election promising voters a better life, a higher standard, new jobs, investments, the survival of Kosovo in Serbia, avoidance of conflict with the world and the continuation of Serbia's European integration, which should have been crowned with the EU membership. The global economic crisis, but also choices of government without political authority which has failed to successfully solve problems, contributed to the failure of campaign promises related to the

standard of living and economy. Truly speaking, many other European governments also failed to meet the promises, but whatever the objective reasons, citizens are only interested in whether or not they live better.

Since the Government cannot boast of success in the economy, the success in the European integration process is particularly significant for the Democratic Party. Democrats hadn't even hoped to solve the Kosovo during the four-year mandate, but they believed to ensure that the Kosovo problem would not affect the process of European integration. That's why their 2008 election slogan was "Both Kosovo and Europe". That message attracted voters who consider Kosovo part of Serbia but who also do not want Serbia coming into conflict with the most powerful world countries. Thus the Democrats have won the then Serbian Prime Minister **Vojislav Kostunica** and his conservative Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS). Kostunica stated then that Serbia would not join the EU without recognizing Kosovo's independence. Four years later, it showed that Kostunica was right.

The fact that Serbia has not won the application for membership in the EU in December is not a problem in itself as whether it will happen in March. The question is whether Serbia can meet all the requirements of the EU, namely Germany?



German Chancellor Angela Merkel recently asked dissolving of all Serbian state institutions in the north Kosovo, which was not formally mentioned in December as one of the condition for Serbia's candidacy, but it is known that Germany insists on this. That was confirmed by international civilian representative in Kosovo **Pieter Feith**, who was told Serbian reporters that EU members would likely ask Serbia to abolish the so-called parallel structures in northern Kosovo before decision on candidate status. And if so, EU countries will expect Serbia not to schedule elections on the territory of Kosovo, because this is the easiest way to eliminate Serbian institutions - as their mandate is expiring in May. The Serbian government cannot accept this request simply because it is contrary to the Constitution. Citizens of Serbia, including those living on Kosovo, will be able to elect their representatives in the National Assembly and local authorities. This means that the institutions of the Serbian state on Kosovo will be re-elected and democratically legitimated. In addition to this requirement, there are others that cannot be accepted by Serbia. President Tadic has recently confirmed that Serbia is asked to give up the Security Council resolution 1244 of the United Nations adopted in June 1999. The leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) **Ivica Dacic** was the first politician in Serbia who publicly said that Serbia is conditioned to recognize the independence of Kosovo in order to become an EU member. **"Let's stop telling lies and fairy tales. It is requested,"** said Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister.

Therefore, the Democrats are aware that it is possible that Serbia will not win the nomination

in March, which means they are left without the basic theme for the election campaign. This is a problem for the DS, because the party's voters consider European integration the most important objective, so failure in this area increases their disappointment and abstinence. The Democrats therefore urgently need a new theme to restore confidence among those who support them. Only two days after Serbia was not approved the nomination for the EU, the Democrats' Central Committee held a meeting in which Boris Tadic said that the biggest problem of Serbia was economic, not the Kosovo issue. **"The economic question is the biggest problem, not Kosovo"** said Tadic and thus promoted a new theme of the Democratic Party - the economy. His choice is not illogical, but is problematic because of the current situation in the economy.

The Democratic Party is has the authority in the economy. However, the party is not unprecedented in the economic issues. Its biggest rival is the party United Regions of Serbia (URS) led by former National Bank of Serbia and the Deputy Prime Minister **Mladjan Dinkic**. Dinkic's party is part of the ruling coalition and holds several important economic sectors such as economics, international economic relations, local government and the National Investment Plan. The party daily promotes investments coming into the country mainly owing to government subsidies paid to foreign investors for each new job.

It is interesting that almost any investment paid by the government is opened by Dinkic who is the leader of a political party but not in the



Government! More interestingly, the DS and URS officials compete in visiting a newly opened facility, and it often happens that both are visiting the same facilities in a short time span.

It is noticed that other parties in the ruling coalition have distanced themselves from Democrats to which they left all the responsibility for EU candidacy. Everyone is looking for an election theme which will be presented to the voters and does not want to share the responsibility with the Democrats who were mainly deciding on the most important things. Thus, the SPS has chosen a tougher rhetoric towards the Kosovo issue. Socialist leader Dacic has repeatedly suggested the partition of Kosovo, saying exactly what the majority of Serbian citizens think. Dacic sharpened rhetoric towards the international community as well. He accused the international community for betraying the expectations of citizens and said that in 2000 the only requirement was to oust Slobodan Milosevic and that no one mentioned the independence of Kosovo then. **"No one mentioned the issue of independence then and 11 years later we cannot even get the nomination. Who is next to be ousted or extradited to the Hague,"** said Dacic, adding that it was not fair that Serbia did not get the nomination in spite of everything it had done. **"If the EU wants no further expansion, then it should say so,"** said Dacic, adding that he supported the continuation of European integration, but also the preservation of national interests and dignity.

Here we reach a new problem for the ruling Democrats, as the government begins to

resemble a disharmonious orchestra in which everyone is playing its own melody. This will certainly affect the election result. After the meeting of the Democratic Party Central Committee the media reported that the deputy president of the party and the popular mayor of Belgrade **Dragan Djilas** sought the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia **Vuk Jeremic**, Minister for Kosovo and Metohija **Goran Bogdanovic**, as well as other party officials. This information hasn't been officially confirmed, but shows what happens in the party as the elections are approaching, or what will happen after the election if the party does not remain in power.

Those party leaders who do their job, enjoy popularity and stand a chance for a new mandate are not willing to reduce their chances because some other officials are not doing their job. However, Djilas knows very well that Jeremic and Bogdanovic haven't independently pursued Kosovo policy. Therefore, this move seems more like determining of a partisan position. That still something happened on the Main Board of DS was confirmed by President Tadic's statement that it's not time for personal responsibility due to Serbian nomination. Tadic had to say it because his party cannot go to the polls if shaken by internal party conflicts and quarrels. This act preserved the party's unity, but protecting Jeremic and Bogdanovic he claimed responsibility for their actions. The respected analyst **Vladimir Goati** said that this was the first public sign of serious divisions within the leadership core - at the top elite of DS.



The movement "Turning point" whose main feature is the opposition Liberal Democratic Party led by Cedomir Jovanovic announced a clear message that "Europe has no alternative," and that Serbia "is to recognize the independence of Kosovo", which poses yet another problem for the Democrats. Turning point Movement has no capacity to be stronger than the Democratic Party, but it attracts voters who are disappointed in the DS policy.

Unlike the Democrats, Turning point provides clear solutions, and if Serbia does not become a candidate for EU membership, Turning point can count on the votes of supporters of Democrats who believe that EU membership is the most important goal of Serbian politics.

In addition, the existence of Turning point forces the DS to come out to vote independently or in coalition with several parties, but without effect of being in front of the movement supported by NGOs, trade unions, and respected individuals.

Thus the December decision from Brussels spilled on the Serbian political scene in many ways, by determining a course of the next election. These elections will not be fatal for a country as the previous, because there is no danger that the country could fundamentally change the policy. However, the result of Serbian elections will determine Serbia's path over the next few years as well as events in the Western Balkans. That is why the Serbian elections attract great interest, not only in Serbia, and the result of which will leave no one indifferent.