

## FINALLY THE KOSOVO SOLUTION?

If someone had any doubts in the determination of the new Serbian Government to carry out the negotiations that were arranged last year between the representatives of Belgrade and Priština with the intermediation of the European Union – there are no doubts any more. Serbian Government has demonstrated not only the determination to carry out all that previous government arranged but also went one step further. It showed tough will to negotiate with Priština on high political level opposed to the previous Government which insisted only on „technical negotiations“. Normalisation of relations has for years been the condition for further development of Belgrade as well as Priština in the process of Euro integrations. In the last year, especially after the visit of German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Belgrade and Priština, normalization is the term without which is not possible to go on. Serbian as well as Kosovo's leaders is quite well familiar with that fact. However, apart from the pressure of the European Union and the United States of America (USA) that Belgrade and Priština finally find, without formal acceptance of the independence, the solution for problems and untroubled life of ordinary people, there is also mutual interest for that thing to happen.

It is not easy for the Government of the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić to carry out the agreements that previous Government arranged with Priština, especially the one about „the integrational control over the crossing borders“. Simply, according to the Constitution of Serbia, Kosovo is the part of this country. The largest number of Serbs who live today on Kosovo are situated in three municipalities at the north of this province that are close to the borderline with Serbia. They do not admit the Government of Priština, they do not obey Kosovo's laws, and they do not accept that between Serbia and Kosovo there exists any kind of border. Similarly to that think most of the citizens of Serbia. However, whatever the opinion of the citizens should be, „the border“ de facto has existed since 1999. When Serbian security forces withdrew from Kosovo according to the Resolution 1224 of the Security Council of the United Nations and Military-Technical Agreement arranged between NATO and the Yugoslav Army (then mutual army of Serbia and Montenegro). What is more, then current Government of the President Slobodan Milošević agreed to form demilitarized zone („security zone“) on Serbian territory along the borderline with Kosovo that measured 5 kilometers on the ground and 25 kilometers in the air, where the members of Serbian army and the police were forbidden to be present. NATO and the KFOR agreed in the year 2001, after the democratic changes in Serbia, that Serbian army and police again enter the security zone but it has never been formally abolished. Surely that it is quite clear to NATO as well as to European Union that any kind of the demand that Serbian army and police leave the security zone today would be impossible to fulfill but the fact is that they did not show good will to formally abolish this zone up until nowadays.

It speaks about the lack of mutual trust between NATO and Serbia. Maybe the reason for that is the fact that Serbia is the only country on the Balkans that proclaimed military independence by the decision of its Parliament, meaning that it refused to become NATO member, despite the fact that it is in the Programme „Partnership for Peace“.

So, the border exists but as there is not any border. Among Serbia and Kosovo, at least in the north part of Kosovo where Serbs are majority, there is literally a free flow of people and goods, across the official but also across the unofficial crossing borders. At the official roads leading to the north there existed the spots put by the KFOR (the international military forces in charge with the security on Kosovo) but their control of people and goods were on the level of the check if there were any drugs or weapon. The trucks with goods were sent to the „passing through customs“ in the south part of Kosovska Mitrovica (Kosovska Mitrovica is town separated in two parts in a way that in the north part live Serbs and in the south part Albanians) where mostly they do not go. Goods that enter Kosovo that way easy find their way wherever there is a need for that no matter if it is the part of Kosovo where Serbs live or it is the part where Albanians live. Surely, that goods can go the same way back to Serbia. Simply, since the border between Kosovo and Albania does almost not exist, with just a bit of skills that smugglers have, the goods from Tirana (the Capital of Albania) can come to Belgrade without any controls or paid customers. This situation is harmful for the budgets of Serbia, Kosovo and Albania. The question of customs, meaning the control of goods, should be clearly economic question that the Governments of Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and the European Union could easily agree about because it is in the interest of all to bring order in that area. Still, at Balkans every question is political question, so the question of goods control and passing through customs of the goods has become the question of state sovereignty.

All Serbian Governments since the democratic changes in 2000 were aware of these problems but did not have either the capacity, or abilities to solve them exactly because they have become the political questions. Namely, the first Serbian Government after the democratic changes that was led by the Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić, then tried to, in February 2001 put on the roads that led from Serbia to Kosovo customs spots in order to record all the goods going to Kosovo and prevent its return in Serbia. This trial immediately caused severe objections of the leaders of Serbs from the north of Kosovo and almost the fall of the Government because the second biggest partner in the Government, the Democratic Party of Serbia with the President Vojislav Koštunica was against this measure. Djindjić was forced to give up his intention even though he was aware that thus Serbian budget was losing millions of euros of profit. Namely, apart from the fact that goods were not recorded, Kosovo was, almost until these days, excluded from Serbian system of value added tax (VAT). It is easy to imagine what kind of possibilities it creates for manipulating if there does not exist the control of goods?. Serbia invests on the north of Kosovo like in other parts where Serbs live around 500 thousand euros per year, and media in Belgrade have been dealing for months with the manipulations happening at the moments of investing these assets. However, according to the data that are not complete, Serbia sold goods at the territory of Kosovo in the year 2010 the value of 300 thousand euros, while the import to Serbia from Kosovo was a few million euros. It is estimated that the value of „grey zone“ meaning the import without any taxes is at least around 40 per cent of that value, and the data of Serbia and the data of Kosovo about the import and export differ in around 30 per cent!?

The thing that no one could estimate is how many goods were formally entering the north of Kosovo in order to be free of VAT and then illegally entering Serbia. The new Government was aware of this abuse because one of its first measures was to bring Kosovo into the Serbian system of VAT.

In order to be understood the difficulties the Serbian Government are facing today when trying to administer the agreement about borders, we must understand the division of Serbian society concerning Kosovo. Kosovo has got a special status in the feelings of the citizens of Serbia, and most of them consider that the Albanians in the last hundred years have ravished it by force of Serbs, putting them under pressure to move away. Serbs are quite sensitive concerning the question of Kosovo because it is the place of the origin of the medieval Serbian state and today there are many historical monuments and the monasteries many of which are under the protection of the UNESCO. Anyway, the headquarter of the powerful Serbian Orthodox Church is in Peć, on Kosovo. A great number of influential people in Serbia come from Kosovo. Serbs from Kosovo have their own representatives in the Serbian Parliament so this question is of great importance for Serbia. Finally, Serbia withdrew from Kosovo after military intervention of NATO pact, which the citizens of this country even today call the criminal because in 78 days of lasting, the infrastructure, factories, schools, health care institutions, media houses, cultural acts, churches and monasteries were severely damaged.

Serbian economic experts estimated the damage of bombing at around 30 billion dollars and the estimations about the victims among citizens of Serbia vary between 1200 and 2500 died and around 5000 wounded. That is why the citizens of Serbia consider that Kosovo was taken by force and in war despite the fact that most of them support reasonable solutions and truly wish the solution to be found for the life of Serbs and Albanians.

It is the reason why Kosovo is an ideal topic for all Serbian nationalists who use the feelings of citizens in order to increase their popularity. The Governments that ran Serbia after the democratic changes in the year 2000 headed by the Democratic Party (DS) first led by the assassinated Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić and the former president Boris Tadić had to be additionally cautious while solving the Kosovo problem. The Democratic Party stands for the pro-European party, and for the nationalists in Serbia that means that you are not nationally aware. However, this not being true, this belief has become a general spot, and that is why the Governments led by the democrats (popular name for the Democratic Party) had to be really careful while solving this problem and to keep proving that they did not „betrayed Kosovo“. The consequence out of fear about being accused of the betrayal was not solving of life problems, as it was the question of „customs stamps“ because of which at one moment was stopped the Serbian export to Kosovo, which was against the interests of the Serbian economy. It happened that democrats thought nationalists might like them, but these trials would always end in fiasco. It was best seen during the last year when emerged the demonstrations on the north of Kosovo because of the trial of Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Tachi to take over the border crossings by force.

The democrats then, wanting to show that they did not sell Kosovo, stood at the head of the demonstrations and the organisation of the crossing border blockings and then they quickly afterwards withdrew after being warned from the international community, and being accused of exactly the thing they wanted to avoid. There we come to the crucial mistake that the Democratic Party (DS) was making in the governments it was leading concerning Kosovo. Instead of searching for the systematic and final solution for the Kosovo problem, the democrats, meaning their leader Tadić, were trying to prove to the nationalists that they were patriots. And it was mission impossible. That is why the governments led by the democrats did not have that capacity to solve the problem of Kosovo. The exception is only the attempt of the Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić in 2002. To immediately start with the solution of Kosovo question, and not to wait for the moment when the leading countries of the international community decided to proclaim the independence of Kosovo. For the first time Serbia then had the initiative, and the idea of the democratic Prime Minister Djindjić supported the leaders of the Serbs from Kosovo. Djindjić's idea did not get the support of the European Union and the United States of America. It is interesting that at the same side with them were the Serbian nationalists who did not support Djindjić's idea. It was expected because their politics was the maintaining the status quo and waiting for the geopolitical changes in the world. Anyway, not much longer after that Serbian Prime Minister was assassinated by the part of the police unit which had quite troublesome role in wars at the territory of former Yugoslavia. His successor at the head of the Democratic Party Boris Tadić, who not long after became the President of Serbia, did not even try to continue this road. He chose the politics „Kosovo and the European Union” which was in fact the wasting of time, and marketing trick by which he wanted to earn the support of nationalists but the European Union as well. Finally each of them thought that he deceived them and Tadić lost the power at the elections in May this year.

Coming of new Serbian Government which majority consists of the parties in which national rightness public has not got any doubts, consists of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) which leader is the Deputy President of the Government Aleksandar Vučić and the Socialists Party of Serbia led by the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić opened the new possibilities for solving the problem of Kosovo. If we add to that in May this year for the President of Serbia was chosen right wing Tomislav Nikolić, Serbia has got the Government with the capacity to make hard decisions concerning Kosovo. It means, as the deputy Prime Minister Vučić said in public referring to the representatives of Serbian Parliament, „let us lose the least we must and get the best we can“. The new Government shows the determination to very quickly and permanently solve the Kosovo problem. Simply, they understood that Serbia can not progress as a country while it has got open territorial question, and that it influences negatively not only the European integrations that the new government also determined as its prior aim but also the foreign investments, stability of the country and the economy.

That is why the carrying out of the agreement about the border for Serbian Government is only the introduction in more important story – final solution of Kosovo problem. If the Government wants to have the credibility in the upcoming negotiations, it has to show the strength to carry out what its predecessors arranged. If it manage in that, its negotiation position is going to be stronger, and the European Union is aware that the new negotiations are not going to be just letters on the paper.

Leader of the strongest governing party Serbian Progressive Party, Aleksandar Vučić, talked to the representatives of the Serbian Parliament about that, telling that to the idea „not to accept the negotiations that were talked about in the Brussels and state that we can not accept what previous government agreed, at every place in the western world would tell us that we were not serious partners and that we can not talk about anything“ The Government has, beside the evidence that it can carry out the arranged topics, these days demonstrated that it can influence the leaders of Kosovo's Serbs to accept what Serbia is stating. Namely, after only a few days of blocking the places where the objects for the „integrated control of the crossing border“ are going to be build, the President Tomislav Nikolić has convinced the leaders of Kosovo's Serbs to accept the Government politics and withdraw. Now, in front of the coalition there is a work to first introduce the opposition with the Platform for the negotiations with Kosovo, and then to achieve the support for that from the intelligence, first of all the one of right wing. It can not be unnoticed that Serbian Orthodox Church did not publicly opposed the carrying out of the agreement about the border which is the success for the Government if we unofficially know that the bishops (high ranked church dignitaries in the Orthodox Church) were severely against any kind of negotiations with Priština. All in all, Serbian Government has done most of the work in order to be ready for the start of the negotiations about the Kosovo status.

That the Government in only a few months gained respectful credibility in the international community shows also recently finished visit of the first Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of the Defence Of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić to Washington where he was welcomed in a very high level including the Minister of Defence of the USA Leon Paneta. Warming up of the relations with the USA and well as closer relations to Germany with which the best cooperation is in the field of the struggle against corruption and organised criminal and improved relations with the European Union show what kind of support Serbian government has got. Besides, Dačić's Government managed to strengthen the relations with Russian Federation and Russian President Putin. Simply, Dačić's Government has in a short time managed to regain the international positions that former president Tadić, only him knowing how, managed to lose. If this Government manage to fet the date of the beginning of negotiations about the joining of Serbia to the European Union in the following period, which is quite certain as things stay today, the parties that constitute the Government will show that they are in the process of eurointegrations more successful than the democrates which trademark it was.

All of it create the excellent stage for the final agreement about Kosovo. Serbian Government has got one more argument why it is necessary that the agreement happen exactly now. It is obvious that the opposition in Serbia does not have the authority to maintain the agreement about Kosovo nor enough strength to carry it out. So, either the agreement is going to be made with the current Government or there will not be any for the decades to come and Kosovo is going to remain the frozen conflict. It means that with Serbia there must be made a compromise which is going to be painful for both Belgrade and Priština.



The part of international community which considered that Kosovo was going to achieve the independence only by putting a constant pressure on Serbia now will have to change the strategy because that politics failed. The insisting on such a politics would bring the Government in Serbia in a situation of not being capable of making an agreement, which would cause long lasting damage both to Belgrade and Priština. By the final solution of Kosovo question or the „historical agreement“ both Serbia and Kosovo are going to get much. Serbia is going to solve the „problem of all problems“ which has been torturing it for the decades, is going to get the strong support of the international community and is going to become the leader at the Balkans with the support of the USA and the European Union. Kosovo is going to solve its „problem of all problems“ and is going to regulate the relations with Serbia and it can turn to the future.

Serbia has obviously learned a lesson from its history that cost it much in the past. Turning of the USA and strengthening of the relations with the most important country of the world with keeping close relations with the Russian Federation and China is the road that every small country could only wish for. Now for the final agreement is only necessary the cooperativeness of the leaders of Kosovo's Albanians and the understanding of the historical moment they are facing. With all the respect for the democratically chosen representatives of the people on Kosovo, history showed that the agreement with them first goes from the Washington. To the USA is thus only needed a strong leader on Kosovo who would be capable of maintaining the negotiations and to fight the unreal expectations of the Kosovo Albanians. Maybe thus Ramush Haradinaj the man who is considered to be war criminal in Serbia and on Kosovo the national hero is going to become the Prime Minister of Kosovo?