



IS SERBIA GOING TO ELECT THE PRESIDENT?

The local and parliamentary elections in Serbia have been scheduled, the leading parties have handed the ballots and started the fight for votes but there is one dilemma – are there going to be scheduled early presidential elections in May as well?

The presidential elections in Serbia should regularly be held at the beginning of 2013. According to the Constitution of Serbia the mandate of the President of Serbia lasts for five years, and the last elections on which the actual president Boris Tadić won were held in February 2008.

The fact that the pre-electoral campaign of the leading Democratic Party (DS), headed by Boris Tadić is for now completely presidential and personalized best speaks in favour of high probability of holding the presidential elections. In the videos of the democrats (public name for the DS) appears only the President Boris Tadić, he personally gives electoral promises and dominates on public meetings organized by this party. Despite the fact that all the parties in Serbia are 'leading' meaning that in each dominates by fact and in media one leader, it is not the case with the Democratic Party. Yet, it is the party which occupies the Prime Minister and most of the ministers and the president of province government in Vojvodina and several dozens of mayors among which is the mayor of Belgrade and some other biggest towns in Serbia. Thus, so far, the insisting only on the leader of the party in the campaign, can indicate only one thing – everything that the Democratic Party has offered to the voters up till now is the introduction to the campaign of the presidential elections.

The answer to the question whether the voters are going to vote for the president or not in Serbia in May depends on who can have benefits from holding these elections?

Without doubt it is the leading Democratic Party which would have most benefits and whose leader is just actual President of Serbia Boris Tadić. Personal rating of Boris Tadić is better than of the party itself, so it comes as logical to expect that the holding of presidential together with local and parliamentary elections would bring greater success to the Democratic Party. The experience with the political campaigns in Serbia reveals that in the case of holding the elections for more bodies at the same time it is not possible to organize more campaigns at the same time meaning that always one campaign dominates over others. It means, thus, that in the case of scheduling the presidential elections, this campaign will 'cover' all the others (local and parliamentary campaigns). It sounds paradoxical because according to the Constitution the President has got less power than the Parliament and the Government, but the political reality in Serbia is different. Contribution to that is the fact that the presidential elections in Serbia are direct, meaning that the president is elected by all the voters and his legitimacy is thus quite strong compared to the authorities he has got, as well as that the candidates for the President are the leaders of the strongest parties. Besides, as we have already mentioned, since so far in the campaign of the Democratic Party prevails exactly the President Tadić, it means that the Democratic Party, in case of scheduling the presidential elections, would not have to change its strategy and public appearance.



Scheduling of presidential elections would help the Democratic Party to solve one of the greatest problems in their campaign – the question of the candidate for the Prime Minister. In opposition to the strongest oppositional party, Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which has already applied its leader Tomislav Nikolić for the Prime Minister, the democrates do not have the candidate for this position. There are several reasons for that, but the most important is that inside the Democratic Party is not possible at this time reach the census about the suggestion for the Prime Minister candidate. Inside the party itself prevails the conviction that the future Prime Minister should be a strong political figure because the experience from former government taught us that the Prime Minister- technocrate can not govern the government consisted of the political parties' representatives. The problem lies in a fact that besides the party's leader Tadić who has got undoubted authority and his deputy Dragan Djilas who has decided to be the candidate for the mayor of Belgrade in the Democratic party itself there are no other officials that could get the support from whole party to become the Prime Minister candidates. Since there is no agreement about the candidate for the Prime Minister this question can become a disadvantage in the forthcoming campaign especially if we bear in mind that the strongest oppositional party has got their candidate for the Prime Minister who is also the leader of the party. The additional problem to the democrates presents the fact that Ivica Dačić publicly stresses his wish to become the Prime Minister, current Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of the Police , the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia , the minor coalitional partner in the governing coalition. The leader of the socialists (public name for SPS) just sees his chance to become the Prime Minister in the fact that in the Democratic Party there is no agreement about who is going to be the Prime Minister if that party wins the elections as well as the fact that without his party there is no future government. All of it is quite embarrassing for the governing democrates and can affect the electoral results. Thus, scheduling the presidential elections for the Democratic Party means solving of that problem.

Preoccupied with the presidential campaign public will no longer be occupied with the question who the candidates for the Prime Minister are. Another additional reason for scheduling the presidential elections is the fact that even the winning on parliamentary elections in May for the Democratic Party does not guarantee the winning of this party's candidate on the presidential elections next year.

In the Democratic party exists the fear that due to the difficult economic situation in the country , if the voters are not satisfied with the work of the Government , they can punish this party at the presidential elections. The reason more is that in this campaign, the government as well as the opposition, give their promises to the citizens easily so the disappointment in the government, whoever is going to form it, after a few months is almost inevitable. That is the reason why it seems that the chances of the Demcratic Party and its leader Boris Tadić to be re-elected for the president are higher in May this year then at the beginning of the next year.Finally, the story about holding of early elections for the President of the Republic has been so present in the public during the last month that their not holding now in May would be interpreted as the weakness of the President himself or the Democratic Party, as a fear that they can not win these elections.



It can have some consequences on elections that are going to be held in May as well as on the regular presidential elections. Simply speaking, if the Democratic Party was not serious about the holding of the early presidential elections, it should not have mentioned it to the public.

When deciding whether presidential elections are going to be held or not the democrates will have to take into consideration the negative consequences of this decision. First, in order to hold the early elections, president Tadić must resign. Despite that Tadić's resignation could be acceptably explained to the voters as that it is his wish to decrease state expences by not organizing the elections two times in a year, the entrance in the electoral campaign with the resignation is the disadvantage. Besides, if the president Tadić resignes, he would not administer the functions of a President during the electoral campaign (according to the Serbian Constitution when the President of the Republic resignes, the function of a President until new elections officiates the President of the Parliament.) It means that he could not carry out the state duties during the campaign which presents the significant part of his campaign and his image. After all, when the actual President who administers that function candidates for the new mandate the base of his campaign is the previous work and administering of state obligations. In the case of his resign, Tadić would be deprived of that. Finally, the greatest problem is that other parties of the leading coalition apart from the democrates and the socialists do not have serious candidates for the president. It refers on the first place to the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) and the party United Regions of Serbia (URS). It is realistic to expect that these two parties, if the presidential elections are to be held together with the parliamentary and local elections, will provide weaker results contrary to that there were no presidential elections to be held together with the parliamentary. The reason for that is simple. These parties can not support Tadić for the President because it would directly influence their (un)success. The candidates for the President that these two parties can offer are such that the part of their voters will vote Tadić as the candidate for the President. It is going to be even more noticeable because it is realistic to expect that in the duel of two favourites in the competition for the President of Serbia, the leader of the Democratic Party Boris Tadić and the leader of the Progressive Party Tomislav Nikolić will create a referendum atmosphere which will contribute to them getting voices from the voters that are not the followers of their parties. Most of the voters in Serbia (even though these two parties occupy more educated voters and from urban areas) are not capable of making the difference, meaning to vote on more different ballots for different parties. To explain, it means more votes for the Democratic Party and Tadić and less voices for the Liberal-Democratic Party and the United Regions of Serbia. As a consequence, it can happen that the Democratic Party gets more voices but to lack the partner for constituting the government after the elections because its smaller coalitional partners may not enter the Parliament. Besides, if the presidential elections are to be scheduled, the Democratic party will not be able to run its independent campaign for the Capital of Serbia, Belgrade as well as for the parliament of the northern province of Vojvodina. Namely, the Democratic Party in Belgrade has got the charismatic mayor Dragan Djilas while the leader of this party in Vojvodina is successful Bojan Pajtić. Both are the vice presidents in their party but they managed to get wider support in the public than it has their party. Just because of that, their independent campaigns in Vojvodina and Belgrade would have greater chances for success.



In the case of scheduling the presidential elections , the independent campaigns in Belgrade and Vojvodina are almost not possible to provide which will lead the Democratic Party to the same success in these areas as in the case of presidential elections.

Apart from the democrates and the progressives, the only party that is satisfied with the scheduling of presidential elections is the Socialistic Party of Serbia. This party whose President was the former President of Serbia Slobodan Milošević has been completely transformed in the modern party of left wing under the leadership of Ivica Dačić . During the last four years Dačić has been administering the functions of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Police and is the best marked minister in Serbian government. His personal ranking is higher than the party's ranking so the scheduling of presidential elections is suitable for him. He has already announced his candidacy for the President, he has claimed to win both Tadić and Nikolić and he has entered the campaign sovereignly. Surely, Dačić knows that he is not going to be the President, but he is convinced that the third place in the presidential competition opens the path to his goal – the place of Prime Minister. Namely, it is clear that neither Tadić nor Nikolić are going to win the first round of presidential elections. If it comes to the second round, either one or the other are going to need the help of the third if they want to be elected for the president. It is exactly where the chance is for Dačić – to demand and get the place of Prime Minister.

For the strongest oppositional party , Serbian Progressive Party, it is suitable scheduling of the early presidential elections. That is the exact reason why the leader of this party, Tomislav Nikolić , has several times asked Tadić to schedule the presidential elections. The progressives would in the case of presidential elections get one number of voices from other parties of the right wing and surely they would maintain better electoral result. They could also count on the part of the voters of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), the party of the former Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica as well as on the part of the voters of their former party , ultra-nationalistic Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Plainly, in the duel between Tadić and Nikolić they would vote for Nikolić being afraid of Boris Tadić's winning, which is not close to their ideology. Holding of the presidential elections could bring a lot of damage to Serbian Radical Party (SRS) ,that this party may not have entered the Parliament. Despite the fact that Serbian Radical Party and the Democratic Party do not have any programme similarities and advocate completely different values in society, they are at this moment some kind of allies. Namely, main opponents to the governing democrates, the progressives, emerged from the discription of the Serbian Radical Party. That is why, at this moment, the progressives are greater opponents to the Serbian Radical Party than the democrates. So the interest of the democrates is that Serbian Radical Party becomes stronger and stronger because it is obvious that this party will never enter the post-electoral coalition with the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS).The leader of Serbian Radical Party , Vojislav Šešelj, stands at the Hague (The Netherlands), where he is on trial under the suspicion of committing war crimes and he can not take part in politics. It is interesting to mention that the government of Serbia this week gave guarantees to the Hague Tribunal in order to enable Šešelj to come back to the country and to wait for the pronouncement of the verdict being free.



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Of course, by the ending of the procedure, he can not enter politics or have any public appearances, but obviously it counts that his very showing up in the country which he left in 2003. would lessen the ranking of the progressives and increased it for the radicals. By the way, Serbian Radical Party, besides Šešelj, does not have the candidate for the President, so the holding of the presidential elections can push it deeper, under the census for the Parliament.

The possible holding of the presidential elections would, as the things are right now, significantly change relations in power and chances of the individual parties in May. So we can not say it is not important whether the elections are going to be held or not. Anyway, we are going to be informed and find out the answer by the fifth of April when it is the deadline for the elections to be scheduled so as the citizens of Serbia on the elections on the sixth of May could elect the President as well.