



PRE-ELECTORAL FINISH

There is less than a week till the elections in Serbia that are going to be held on 6th of May. As it is usually so, the campaign is more and more intensive, and the parties are preparing final aces in the holes for the finish of the electoral race.

The leading Democratic Party (DS) which comes at the elections in the coalition „ The choice for better life – Boris Tadić“ still addresses to the voters almost exclusively through the activities and promotions of the coalition presidential candidate Boris Tadić. It is both good and bad for the democrates.

It is good because Boris Tadić is more popular than his party, and his team is convinced that they can win in a direct duel with their opponent candidate, the leader of the opposition Tomislav Nikolić. The bad thing is that the Democratic Party does not use its greatest advantage over other parties – the team of people that have been working at the responsible state functions for years. The fact that Boris Tadić mentions his team in one of his pre-electoral videos is not enough for the Democratic Party to use that advantage. The additional problem to the democrats is also the fact that the president Tadić leads one political campaign for the presidential and parliamentary elections while his deputy Dragan Djilas leads completely different in the race for the Belgrade Assembly, and the party in Vojvodina (the authonomy province at the north of Serbia which is together with Belgrade the most developed part of the country)leads a kind of the third campaign. Every campaign has got its messages, its visual identity, is led in a different way, and sometimes it really does not seem as it is the same party.

There is an impression that some parts of the Party are „ ashamed of „ the president of the party and the politics that has been led in the previous several years and that they think they can make better electoral result on their own. At this moment it is maybe true but is very dangerous for the future of the party as the unique political organisation.

The leading democrates have partly corrected their central campaign and messages they are sending to the voters. At the beginning of the electoral race they were promising – jobs, investments,safety. Now they do not force messages in which they are promising jobs and inestments but mostly they focus on safety. To all those who are observing the surveys it is quite clear why Tadić insisted on jobs and investments , because the citizens stated the problem of unemployment as the most important. That is why the leader of the democrates was not coming out of the factories at the beginning of the campaign taking photos among foreign investors and workers. It is obvious that the effects of this campaign are not satisfactory for the democrates so in the final week the only Tadić's message is – safety. This message corresponds quite well to the negative campaign that at the same time the Democratic Party is leading against Tadić's opponent Nikolić in which they remind the citizens of his contradictory statements, of the doubts about education as well as of the argumentative coalitional partners.



Simply, while on one side the democrates are stressing that their candidate offers safety and certainty, they are trying to convince the citizens that their opponent is just the opposite, that he is unreliable and that citizens led by him do not have a certain future.

Honestly speaking, Tadić's team is doing the only thing it can in this campaign. Facing the facts that the government of the democrates is not popular, that many of party's representatives are in a fear for their own ratings and they do not want to be identified with these results, a certain parts of the party are leading their own campaigns in which they do not want to mention the party and they played on one only possible card – safety. Their ace in the hole is Boris Tadić and they try to turn the elections into the voting for better life and not the referendum about the results of the government so far. And for that they do not need only the promotion of their own candidate but the discrediting of the opponent candidate.

At that point we are coming to the most powerful weapon of the democrates in this campaign-negative campaign against Nikolić. The elections that are currently being held in Serbia are the first at which the parties have to sign the negative campaign they are leading against their opponents. Until now those campaigns were held over the associations of the citizens or not being signed. When it is unknown who is responsible for the negative campaign then there is no limit in it. That is the reason why most of the citizens have got bad reaction at the negative campaign calling it „dirty“. However, the legal obligation of the parties to sign the negative campaign brought to the fact that now that kind of campaign is based on facts as well as that there is a possibility of banning the videos that would overcome the legal limits. Negative campaign is usual in democratic systems and i.e. in the USA it comprises the greatest part of the campaign. Truly, every candidate has got a right to remind others of illogical or contradictory statements of his opponent or of some facts from his current work, providing he is using correct data. Exactly that is what differs dirty from negative campaign which is the deviation of the democratic system due to the fact that it not reveals the truth. That the negative campaign is usual at the elections in other countries shows the example of the candidate of the oppositional Republican party for the President of the USA Mitt Romney about whom the leading democrates have already published the video from few years ago on which he speaks that „dismissing of the employees is normal in capitalism“ as well as that he „personally likes to dismiss people“. For the candidate for the President of the USA whose main key in the campaign is the decrease of unemployment this statement is quite embarrassing despite the context and the date of the statement. So, the negative campaign of the democrates against the opposition candidate Tomislav Nikolić has given the results and partly motivated sleepy voters of the Democratic Party to come to the elections. The problem with this campaign is that you must not exaggerate because the voters in Serbia generally do not like that kind of campaign, meaning that there is a danger of making a victim out of your enemy. Maybe that is the reason why the oppositional progressives decided to use much calmer negative campaign that the Democratic Party „has already spent four million euros on a dirty campaign“ against the progressives.

However, it is noticeable that the president Boris Tadić has in the previous week decided only to visit part of the Serbia south of Belgrade and not to show up recently in Vojvodina or in Belgrade. Is the reason for that the rating of the Democratic Party in part of Serbia south of Belgrade or has Boris Tadić let his deputies Dragan Djilas (the mayor of Belgrade) and Bojan Pajtić (the president of the provincial government in Vojvodina) to lead campaigns independently in parts of Serbia in which they are leading ,the time will tell?

The strongest oppositional party , Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) surpriced with the support it received last week from the former mayor of New York City and one of the most powerful american politicians Rudolph Giuliani.

The coming of Giuliani to Belgrade was certainly a surprise because foreign politicians have not often been the members of political campaigns in Serbia. Still, the fact that Giuliani was brought by the oppositional Serbian Progressive Party which emerged out of ultra-nationalistic Serbian Radical Party (SRS) is particularly interesting because this party is still today accused by its political opponents of „ leading Serbia into isolation „ beside the fact that its leaders Nikolić and Vučić are gladly seen as guests in Washington and Brussels. Giuliani came to Belgrade to support the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) mayor candidate Aleksandar Vučić.

His coming caused a lot of attention of media and Giuliani himself was a guest by large number of media including also the most popular political talk show in the country.

To the great publicity of Rudolph Giuliani contributed the democrates themselves by very awkward reaction in which they first accused him of „ the support in bombing Serbia „ (NATO bombing of Serbia which happened in 1999.) and then minimized his work at the position of New York mayor by messages that it is „ better to live in Belgrade than in New York“. It was a wrong way. Simply, for some things , no matter if you are a party or an individual, either you have got or you have not got a credibility to talk about. The democrates have got the credibility when they talk about the European integrations or the economy, but they do not have the credibility to accuse anybody when it is about the theme of bombing Serbia. It is a thing that can be done for example by the ultra-nationalists such as the radicals or the movement Dveri. That is why the accusations of the democrates on account of Giuliani about the bombing of Serbia were the wrong decision and addressing to the voters who do not vote for that party. Is Giuliani going to help the candidate of the progressives Vučić to become the mayor of Belgrade is rather unpredictable concerning the great advantage of the current mayor and the candidate of the leading coalition Dragan Djilas. Still, the support that Giuliani offered to the progressives will be much more of a help to their party at parliamentary and presidential elections. It will enable them to soften the effects of the campaign according to which they will lead the country to uncertainty and conflicts with the international community. The other part of the story refering to Giuliani that was the main topic to media for days about how much it cost and who financed it gave much better impression of discreditation of his visit. The answer to that is still unknown to the public and it remained floating in the air the question who is a misterious „ donor“ who arranged the visit with the consultant company of the former mayor of New York to Belgrade?

In any case, Giuliani „ has finished the job „ for the progressives because they received the additional promotion in the media, they showed to the citizens that they have powerful friends in the world and that helped them a lot to make relative a negative campaign that is led against them. It would be the best for the democrates to accept that fact and to turn to the promotion of their own programme. Anyway, if it was a case at previous elections that the leading Democratic Party received the support by the appearances of the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and the Prime Ministers of Bulgaria and Macedonia, Sergej Stanišev and Nikola Grujevski, why could not the former mayor of New York Giuliani support the progressives?

Seven days before the elections, just after the departure of Giuliani, the progressives announced their last final electoral ace in the hole – the Prime Minister candidate. The candidate for the Prime Minister is Jorgovanka Tabaković, an economist who has been on the political scene of Serbia for the decades. Tabaković is a good choice for the position of Prime Minister if we take care of an image she has got among people. First, according to the survey of public , the citizens want to see a woman and an expert on the position of the Prime Minister. Second, the progressives' candidate for the Prime Minister causes general sympathies when she appears in public, she associates the voters of their mothers, she is not conflictive person, and is very skillful in her public appearances. The third, this candidate is difficult to attack mostly because she has never been radical in her statements , so it is hard to find her announcements that would now be troublesome even from the time when she was the representative of the ultra-nationalistic Serbian Radical Party.

A while ago, the democrates tried to discredit her by announcing that earlier as an employee in Telekom company she has got an apartment. But this attack turned into a disaster because the Democratic Party had chosen a wrong man for that, the former Deputy President of the Parliament Božidar Djelić who is in Serbia connected with many affairs and privatisations which is not popular. The greatest benefit of listing the names of the candidates for the position of Prime Minister have got the progressives because the Democratic Party is hardly going to answer to this move. Namely, the Democratic Party has got only one good answer – to candidate Tadić's deputy and the candidate for the mayor of Belgrade Dragan Djilas for the Prime Minister. It is almost not possible so the democrates are going to try to ignore this move of the progressives

Still, the progressives have not yet solved the basic problem of their campaign –they have not become a national movement for changes. There exactly lies only chance of the progressives to win the elections because they can win in an atmosphere of referendum in which the citizens would choose between present life and changes. Changes are magical word for the winning of the progressives. However, in order to offer changes you have to prove to the citizens that you have a credibility to provide them. For that the progressives lack wide national movement in which ,apart from parties ,would be the Unions, students, unemployed, workers, labourers....The progressives have not managed to form this kind of movement and few little controversial parties among which there are extreme right wing or left wing still pay the price because of that.

In this kind of atmosphere two most powerful parties enter the last week of the campaign. As it is usually so, in it there can be expected ,apart from the increased tensions ,new surprises and attempts of the parties to gain voices in the last minute.