



Reconstruction and that sort of thing...

"What a responsible government does? It saves, invests, doesn't ingratiate, respects long-term interests of the country. What a demagogic and irresponsible government does? It spends, borrows, meets only small desires thus buying social peace, but all at the cost of long-term decline", were the words of the Serbian Prime Minister **Zoran Djindjic**, who was assassinated eight years ago. These and other of his words will be available in a virtual museum opening on the eighth anniversary of the assassination (www.zorandjindjic.org). The citizens of Serbia more and more respect the work of the late Prime Minister and recognize the gap in the political arena caused by his departure. Do Serbian politicians recognize these words?

Judging by the government reshuffle in progress, the Serbian political elite, including Djindjic's Democratic Party, hasn't understood the difference between responsible and irresponsible government.

For months announced, the reconstruction of the Serbian government will be formally completed by the next week. The Government of the Prime Minister **Mirko Cvetkovic**, formed in July 2008. , has so far consisted of 24 members from 21 sectors, while after reconstruction it will have 21 members

and 17 departments. If we exclude the fact that the government will have three members and four ministries less, that eight ministers lost their functions and that we got four new ministers - nothing has changed.

According to a poll taken in February this year, more than 73 percent of citizens believe that Serbia is heading in the "wrong direction". Even more defeating for the government is that only 9 percent of Serbian citizens believe that the economic situation will be better in the coming year, as opposed to 73 percent of citizens who believe it will only aggravate. People's views on the government's capability are even more devastating - more than 87 percent of citizens believe that the Government is unable to cope with the economic crisis. The problem with rating has also Prime Minister Cvetkovic. According to the survey, 28.7 percent of citizens believe he does his job well, as opposed to 50.7 percent who believe he is not. It is interesting that even 15.2 percent of citizens does not have a formed opinion on the Prime Minister's work and that 4.4 percent has never heard of him. Serbia is one year before the election and it is clear that the ruling coalition must do something to try to improve their rating. Reconstruction is now one possible solution for this.

Poor rating of the Government, inter alia, is a consequence of a mistake made during its formation. Namely, then, the Serbian President



Boris Tadic, who is also leader of the strongest party in the ruling coalition, the Democratic Party (DS), decided that Prime Minister would be non-party person, an economist and former finance minister - Mirko Cvetkovic. Cvetkovic appeared in the political life of Serbia a year before elections for prime minister, when he was suddenly proposed by the Presidency DS to become the Minister of Finance of the Government of **Vojislav Kostunica** (now leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Serbia and the former president of Yugoslavia, the joint state Serbia and Montenegro). According to reliable information, he was proposed as a third possible solution, but the first two candidates turned down the post. His "political career" has been meteoric. The government in which he was finance minister collapsed in 2008 and he became prime minister of Serbia after the early elections. Cvetkovic is a technocrat, a man without a leader's charisma and political influence, but also without support in the Democratic Party and other parties of the ruling coalition. Truly speaking, on the election for prime minister, as well as a year earlier, Cvetkovic emerged as a compromise between two fractions in the party which proposed their party officials - Foreign Minister **Vuk Jeremic** and Prime Minister of Vojvodina (northern province of Vojvodina in Serbia, which is most developed) **Bojan Pajtic**. In accordance with the situation, Cvetkovic left the most important political decisions to be made elsewhere. Without political support he failed to become the authority to his deputies, who are either leaders of smaller parties in the ruling coalition or senior officials of the Democratic Party. He became an executive of decisions.

The ruling coalition made no attempt to build him a public image of the Prime Minister who decides on important issues.

The president and leaders of other ruling coalition parties often in public took over the responsibility for the Government and thus further destroyed its reputation. The consequence of this behavior is the low ratings of the Government. Of course, the truth is, it must be stressed that the global economic crisis has further complicated the position of the government and prevented it to implement many planned projects. The fact is that the government did not come upon the citizens and did not offer answers to the problems with which they live. The popularity of certain state officials, particularly those of members of the DS, like the Prime Minister of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Bojan Pajtic, Belgrade Mayor Dragan Djilas and Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac, proves that in times of crisis can have popular support if it is good for business. Mirko Cvetkovic was obviously the wrong man in the wrong place. The problem for the ruling coalition is that after three years to realize that the low ratings reflect the Government and the party's ratings.

Here we arrive at the true motive for the reconstruction of the Government. The ruling coalition hasn't embarked on it because they want to cut the costs of the too large Serbian state administration, or to have fewer officers who better perform management tasks or to get more effective government.



For the ruling coalition, the reconstruction is a marketing move, or an introduction to the election campaign.

Therefore, the reduced Serbian government will be in the function of the election campaign and its new program, announced by Prime Minister Cvetkovic, should be understood as an elective with a number of short-term measures directed at voters. That's why Cvetkovic was unable to explain in the popular TV talk-show show "Impression of the Week" (Serb. "Utisak nedelje") why the Serbian government is reconstructed. What he said was that the reconstruction was done **"for Serbia to get a European government"**. Otherwise, when the story about the reconstruction was launched in the public, the presented reasons for its implementation were reduction of state administration and public spending and greater efficiency of public administration. A little later, Prime Minister Cvetkovic requested all Ministers to submit reports on their work in order to "decide" on who will stay and who will not on a ministerial function. He received the reports, but the public was never informed on them. Finally, the reconstruction was done because it was estimated that it was the necessary move for the ruling coalition in an election year. Since the reconstruction hasn't resulted in costs and administration reduction, nor improved administrative efficiency, the public was offered an explanation that the reconstruction had been implemented because of Europe?

The story of the reconstruction is the story of the ruling coalition, or about its efficiency. The issue of reconstruction of the Government and responsibility of some government members for their work, was initiated by Serbian President Boris Tadic in 2009. This idea was repeated and rebuilt by the President, to reach September 2010 that was announced as the month of reaching the agreement between coalition partners on the reconstruction of the Government. Then the promotion of the idea was taken over by a leader of the G17 Plus, **Mladjan Dinkic**. The end of 2010 was set as the deadline for the reconstruction, and then the end of January 2011, to make a final deadline for the first of March 2011. Thus was reconstructed the Government for which Prime Minister Cvetkovic several months ago said was **"working well and that you don't change the team that wins"**?

The fact is that if it hadn't been for Dinkic's energy, perseverance and resignations of his ministers and him personally, the reconstruction wouldn't have probably happened. If it had been according to Dinkic – the reconstruction would've been executed more seriously. Only he was aware that for improving the image of the Government, it was necessary to change its first man.

Only such a radical change might have given some results among the voters, although the new prime minister would not have had a year in power. Public announcing of this idea has cost Dinkic his



position in the Government; serious reconstruction hasn't occurred and it all boiled down to replacing a few ministers.

The way reconstruction was carried out is a victory of G17 Plus and its leader Mladjan Dinkic.

Just a few weeks earlier Dinkic resigned as deputy prime minister in order to prevent being sacked by parliament and it seemed he was completely defeated in a conflict with the DS. However, it appeared that Dinkic managed to keep his party together and most importantly his MPs. It turned out that without the G17 the ruling coalition doesn't have a majority in parliament. So, the reconstruction was carried out under his rules, and he and his party had a big comeback to the political scene. It is true that the ruling coalition has not had much choice after the conflict with Dinkic. Forming of a new majority in the Assembly with votes of the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party, led by a war crimes suspect **Vojislav Seselj**, was not possible, because it would have caused damage for the DS in the election year. The other option was that the DS continues to rule with the help of some of Dinkic's MPs and the Liberal Democratic Party, more European-oriented opposition party, which proved impossible because the G17 delegates remained loyal to their leader. The third option was to immediately call for early elections, which the DS could not allow to happen because it would look that the government collapsed. In addition, the DS is not ready now for elections. It remained to make an arrangement with Dinkic. This fact and the decision of the Democratic Party to retain Mirko

Cvetkovic as Prime Minister determined the method of reconstruction of the Government. It was a small Dinkic's revenge to the coalition partners. Unable to conduct a thorough reconstruction with a new Prime Minister and new energy, he insisted that the changes are made only within the departments that belong to one political party, that parties independently decide which ministers will be dismissed and appointed, and that the merging is made only within the ministries which belong to one party? And so it was. Each party was allowed to dismiss several ministers, and on that basis to merge several ministries into one. Consequently, no respect was paid how to solve problem of the Government's bigness and its inefficiency. Not account was taken whether a minister was working satisfactorily, but parties decided on the basis of their partisan interests. Prime Minister Cvetkovic only collected the proposals and announced reconstruction. As he said in already mentioned TV show "Impression of the Week" - **"the parties propose the personnel, and I say yes or no."** Connoisseurs of the government say the prime minister says only yes.

For the reconstruction to be successful, it is necessary that the Government and new ministers offer new ideas and new energy. However, Prime Minister promised new energy when presenting the reshuffled government to the citizens. However, the way reconstruction was carried out, the way in which the ministries were merged and the names of new ministers – are not promising. Ministries are strangely joined so is already clear that a new government formed after the next election, even if it consisted of the same parties, will certainly make

some new changes. Moreover, it's a big question if some departments will be able to function as a ministry? This refers to the new highly complex department of agriculture, trade, forestry and water management, as well as abolishment of the Ministry of Energy and Mining, that is its merging with Infrastructure and Ministry of Environmental Protection. No less surprising is the new solution of culture and information technology as one single ministry.

Serbia, which claims that its basic goal is joining the European Union, has no Ministry for joining the EU, but has the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, the territory considered as its integral part.

It is interesting that the Ministry of Science is abolished and merged with Education at a time when all European countries invest in education and knowledge of its population. In the end, the Minister of Finance **Diana Dragutinovic** is replaced, to have Prime Minister Cvetkovic as the finance minister as well? The finance department is very complex and requires as its first president not only of top financial experts, but a person who will do only that job. Now the man who hasn't so far successfully managed the Government will additionally manage the Ministry of Finance, composed of the Revenue and Customs.

Thus carried out reconstruction, without a plan, analysis and rational decisions, showed disregard of the ruling coalition to the government institutions and democratic procedures.

Such "partisanship" (a term that used in works of the best known Serbian lawyer and politician **Slobodan Jovanovic** for using the state for party purposes) in the administration shows that the ruling coalition sees public administration as its own prey, which was won in the elections and with what they can you what they wish.

The decision to appoint Cvetkovic as the Minister of Finance shows the plan of the ruling coalition in the coming year. As spin doctors would say, it was decided to "pluck Cvetkovic's muscles" in order to improve government rating. Still, the absence from the media of the President of the Republic and the Democratic Party concerning the reconstruction of the Government is very indicative. It has not been the practice so far, and often interference of other state agencies and political parties of the ruling coalition in the government's work has resulted, among other things, in poor rating of the government. Now everything is left to the Prime Minister Cvetkovic. How will it be possible for someone with such poor ratings to fix the image in such a short time, the question is for government's spin doctors. After all, one of the most popular cartoonist in the country, every day draws Prime Minister Cvetkovic as a waiter in the Government. It's hard to believe that people who are engaged in a



political campaign strategy for the DS do not know this. Rather, the appearance of Cvetkovic is insisted upon so that the other leaders of the Democratic Party, and above all the party leader and President of the Republic, is not publicly associated with the unpopular government. Or more accurately – to avoid being responsible for the reshuffle failure.

In the remaining year of the term, the government will be dedicated to achieving the best possible election result. Thus, we may expect their Program to be a list of short-term measures with immediate effect in order to achieve the best possible election result.

This means that the fundamental societal and economic reforms will be delayed for at least a year and a half. This is very bad news for the citizens of Serbia. How will the measures look like, was announced by Prime Minister Cvetkovic, when he announced introduction of the grace period in repayment of all citizens' loans longer than a year. **"With reduced credit, citizens' lives will improve,"** Cvetkovic said. **"In the next year or two, citizens will be allowed to have their loan installments cut in half and not to pay as much as now"**, explained the Prime Minister and added that 900 thousand people in Serbia currently have long-term debts - residential or consumer loans, such as, for buying a car. There'll be more of such populist measures in this election campaign. How much will they cost the state, no one will be interested. The damage will

be paid by some other government and other generations.

How long will this government be stable? The fact is that it has the same majority in parliament as in previous three years, but G17 is now one foot in the government, and one in opposition, because their leader is outside the executive power. Asked by reporters whether he, as a man in the shadow, will in the future manage his party's MPs, Dinkic said that may be **"the man in the shadow just as much as Boris Tadic is - neither more nor less"**.

Dinkic will be assessing each day whether his party would benefit from the work of the Government or not. His ministers in the Government will run the campaign. He won't be allowed to destroy the Government, but will constantly search for a principled issues, contend with it, and thus campaign indirectly and show voters he can do better than the DS.

Dinkic's first statement as an MP that **"the Government has separated itself from the people"** and that it should be reminded by the parliament who elected it, confirms this theory. Dinkic's support to the government will depend only on whether he can use it to lead a successful campaign or not. That is why, when it comes to the G17 Plus, all scenarios are possible - that all ministers of this party at some point resign, that the party blackmails the government via their MPs in connection with certain projects and legal arrangements. Therefore,



the reconstructed Government will be more unstable.

New energy in the reshuffled government doesn't exist, and there are no new ministers announced as refreshment before the election. From the proposed list of ministers, see absolutely no "new faces in politics". Of the four new ministers, one was a longtime president of the Assembly, two are former ministers and one is the incumbent state secretary. So where is, along with 13 old ministers and prime minister, "new energy" that will increase government's efficiency and authority? Is it not, perhaps, in the new media picture of "energetic prime minister" and in the new law provision on the Government stipulating that its members are committed to represent and express attitudes and decisions of the government when making public appearances, which only confirms the existence of disunity in the government and the ruling coalition.

The Government of Prime Minister Cvetkovic is a bad government. It is general public opinion. Will he manage, by some of his measures, to help the ruling coalition to win elections, the time will show. There is more and more people who believe that the

Government and its results cannot be any advantage for the DS in the upcoming elections and that this party will use its leader Tadic, and popular public officials Djilas, Pajtic and Sutanovac, as its electoral trump card. However, the responsibility remains on the DS because of the fact that during their power Serbia had a bad government. **"The only benefit of a bad government is a lesson, if any. The lesson that in future you will not be caught by sweet and compelling hooks. What is sweet is usually unhealthy. Drugs that cure are bitter. This lesson hadn't been learned entirely in the Serbian history. Otherwise we wouldn't have had so many failures"**, said the late Prime Minister Djindjic. Today's politicians in Serbia are, unfortunately, prone to sweet and quick solutions, instead offering the society drugs that cure. It can be said that they haven't learned lessons of the Serbian history and now we repeat mistakes to the damage of society and citizens.