

## SPINY EUROPEAN WAY

“ I am quite disturbed by this kind of statement because instead of helping start the dialogue it can close it down. Maybe it was more fair to ask from Serbia to admit the independence of Kosovo rather than to admit the state integrity” , said Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic at the press conference after he received the Report of the Serbian Progress prepared by the European Commission ( EC ) from the Ambassador of the European Union ( EU ) in Serbia Vincent Degert .Thing that unnerved Ivica Dacic most was the fact that in the part of the Report concerning the relations of Pristina and Belgrade , beside the demand for further improvement of the dialogue requiring the rising on the higher level and providing of the arranged agreements, for the first time was a demand of Serbia to respect “ the territorial integrity of Kosovo”.

The fact that Serbian Prime Minister, at least indirectly, was not informed in advance about the new demand of the European Union concerning the relations of Pristina and Belgrade additionally made angry Serbian Government. In Belgrade, this demand was understood as the way Brussels is trying to force Serbia to indirectly admit the independence of Kosovo. The explanation for such an interpretation of new European Union demand, Serbian politicians have found at the international law that defines the territorial integrity in the definition of the state as one of necessary terms.

The question of the interpretation of the term “ territorial integrity” has in such a dramatic way tapered the relations of Belgrade and Brussels that the European Commissioner for the European Union Enlargement Stefan Fule the very next day, immediately after the announcement of the Report of the European Commission, travelled, by accident or not, to Serbia. He announced immediately upon his arrival to Belgrade, where he spoke at the meeting of the Board for European Integrations of the National Assembly of Republic of Serbia, that the formulation about “keeping the territorial integrity of Kosovo” from the annual report of the European Commission “ does not prejudice the status of Kosovo but shows that the European Union “ is opposing the division of Kosovo”. The Commissioner Fule pointed out the European Union cares for Serbia. “ I can understand that some questions, particularly those concerning Kosovo, provoke emotions and that people are actually asking a question whether Serbia should enter the European Union and whether European Union cares for Serbia at all. I can confirm that it cares, and in an serious way which I can symbolically confirm by my arrival and by the decision of Catherine Ashton to enter the political dialogue of Belgrade and Pristina”, Fule explained to Serbian representatives. He pointed out that from the latest Report of the European Commission emerged two most important conclusions – “that priorities in the following period should be visible and sustainable improvement of the relations with Kosovo and the continuing of the inner reforms”. There were some speculations about the existence of an informal list of demands, I was asked if there was, besides formal requests, anything unsaid. After the yesterday’s Report of the European Commission it is clear that something like that does not exist”, said Fule.

These explanations in a way calmed down the atmosphere among Serbian politicians so that Aleksandar Vucic , first Deputy President of the Government of Serbia and the leader of the strongest governing coalition, stated that he received “ the insurance from the Commissioner Fule that the formulation about the territorial integrity of Kosovo that has been mentioned in the Strategy of the Enlargement of the European Union , in Serbia has been misinterpreted “ and he added that he “hoped it all was only the question of awkward formulation”.

Vucic pointed out that in the report everything is more or less expected and repeated that there were not “ good and easy solutions” concerning Kosovo and Metohija. Not all of the citizens of Serbia are going to be happy with any solutions so it remains for Serbia to move inside the borders where it can get the best it can and lose the least of what it must lose”, said Vucic.

That statement of Aleksandar Vucic indirectly confirmed the writing of prominent Serbian daily press Blic, referring to the diplomatic circles in Brussels, which announced that Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic acknowledged to the European Union that “ he wants the question of Kosovo to be solved already in the first year of the mandate of Serbian Government “. This writing was not either confirmed or denied by the Government but this wish of Serbian President is logical. Serbian Government knows that the question of Kosovo is “question above all questions” and that Serbia can almost not develop until it solves the open problem of its south province which simply proclaimed its independence in February 2007, which Serbia has never accepted. So, if the Government wants another mandate then it has to start immediately solving the greatest problems burdening the citizens. The attempt of Belgrade and Pristina to finally solve problems that have been lasted for more than a century is going to happen at the negotiations being announced and which the European Commissioner for the Foreign Affairs Katherine Ashton is going to take part in. That Serbian Government puts all its hopes in these negotiations also showed the announcement of President Nikolic that Serbia is going to form the negotiation team as well as that it is going to suggest the Prime Minister Dacic to be the head of the team. Dacic have not yet either confirmed or denied that he is going to lead Serbian delegation at the negotiations with Pristina. “The negotiation team has not been determined yet as well as the one who is going to lead it. But I am going to repeat once again, nobody must hide from the responsibility”, said Dacic and added that “ it cannot be expected that on Serbian side the negotiations are going to be led by the Minister’s assistants or the officials in the Government if in the dialogue Catherine Ashton is going to take part.” It has already been quite clear that the relations of the two strongest parties constituting the Government, Socialists Party of Serbia ( SPS ) led by the Prime Minister Dacic and, according to the electoral result stronger one, Serbian Progressive Party ( SNS ), led by the first Deputy President of the Parliament Aleksandar Vucic are going to be visible through the structure of the negotiating team. Both parties are aware that no matter what the result of the negotiations would be, it is not going to satisfy the citizens’ majority. So for both of them it is necessary to divide the responsibility. Nevertheless, similar processes are going to happen on Kosovo’s side as well.

In any case, Serbia and the European Union reached the breakpoint in their relations. Brussels can no longer claim that from Belgrade is not going to be asked the admittance of Kosovo’s

independence before entering the European Union when it is known the fact that there are some countries members in the European Union that are insisting on that.

And as the mechanism of making decisions in Brussels is such that every country member can put veto on the decision of joining the European Union, it is quite clear that it is enough that only one country insists on the admittance of Kosovo from Serbia that the process of joining to the European Union can be stopped. Belgrade can no longer lead the politics of “both Kosovo and Europe” meaning to claim that joining the European Union and solving of the problem of Kosovo are two separate tracks.

On the other hand, the change of the government in Serbia disabled the European Union from keeping the politics according to which on every Serbian step towards European Union there are new requirements concerning the normalization of relations of Belgrade and Pristina. Simply, the former government led by the Democratic Party ( DS ) of the former President Boris Tadic whose main politics aim was the membership of Serbia in the European Union did not have any other choice but to accept such politics of Brussels. Any kind of stagnation in European integrations was of a great cost for the Democratic Party and that is why this party was, more or less, submissive to the pressures. It was best seen by the end of 2011 when Tadic’s government made great cessions in the politics towards Kosovo in order Serbia could gain the status of the European Union member candidate.

Tadic’s democrats ( public name for the Democratic Party ) considered that reaching the membership candidate status would enable them that on the elections held in spring this year win another mandate. Yet, they lost the elections. The impression is that the European Union itself contributed to the defeat of Boris Tadic because its constant and restrictive conditioning concerning Kosovo made his politics “both Kosovo and the Europe” senseless.

By constitution of the new Government in Serbia everything has changed. New Government proclaimed joining of Serbia to the European Union for its priority but it is quite clear that it would not feel any political harm in case of the stagnation in the European integrations. It is quite cautious in keeping the good relations with the European Union to which also testifies the statement of the Deputy President Aleksandar Vucic “ that the aim of the Government of Serbia is to receive the date of the beginning of the negotiations as soon as possible and at the same time to keep the national integrity and sovereignty” as well as not to think that “ anyone is planning to lead Serbia opposite the European Union, or that it can be real”. However, the European Union will have to take more care in the future that too hard pressure on Serbia concerning Kosovo can lead to Serbian giving up the European integrations. While the belief prevailed that former President Tadic would never give up the integrations, new Government can, if the pressure becomes too hard, not to accept the conditioning. If being so, western countries would not have any more ways to put pressure on Belgrade concerning Pristina. It is indirectly going to lead to the worsening of the relations of Belgrade and Pristina as well as to the situation in the whole region and Kosovo remains frozen conflict. Out of this situation there is no use for anyone –Serbia, Kosovo or the European Union. This is exactly the strongest trump of Serbia in the upcoming negotiations with Brussels.

That this is possible to happen confirmed Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic in the interview for one prominent Serbian press Vecernje Novosti: “ If they condition us officially :Europe or Kosovo – we are going to give up the European way.

I was talking about it in my campaign and my people would not be surprised if I would suggest that. We have reached the point of the organization that we can count on the European Union. It keeps us on distance now only because of Kosovo and Metohija ( Serbian name for Kosovo) . But it can keep us that way for the following hundred years, we are not going to change our attitude towards south province. If they start adding to us new rules that were not the rules for other countries, then they can reject us further from them. In that case, it is better for them to say to us “We do not want you” , said President Nikolic. He added that for now nobody from the European Union “ have not asked of us to admit the independence of Kosovo and Metohia and added that Serbia “ arranges country according to the European standards which helps us provide reforms and arrange Serbia on democratic principles”. “ I agree that the relation with the European Union cannot be built on the fact that every time we get new terms. We only ask of them to set up the same terms as for other countries, no more no less than that”, said President Nikolic.

Left in the shadow of the discussion about the term “ territorial integrity” remained other parts of the Report of the European Commission talking about the situation in other areas in Serbia which are of the importance for joining the European Union. These objections are very important for Serbia because, whether it is going to become the member of the European Union or not, the acceptance of the European standards in society is the question of civilized development of the country. In other words, whether Serbia is going to be the member of the European Union or not is the political decision but Belgrade because of itself has to reform society and the economy in order that country would be competitive in the world and it is exactly what is said in details in the Report of the European Commission.

In the Report it is stated that Serbia has to do lot of things in the reform of the judicial system, the government of Law, social politics, economy, energetic and in the field of the environment protection. At the Report of the European Commission there is an objection that in the Serbian legal system there are around six million unsolved law cases?!

The Report is critical when we are talking about the development of human rights in Serbia, and from Belgrade is expected not only to improve the freedom of expressing but to generally accept the minor and endangered social groups. When we are speaking of the economic reforms , only are mentioned problems concerning insufficient independence of the National Bank of Serbia, quite low position of Serbia concerning banking business and the unemployment. Particularly has been stressed the problem of almost equal relation of employed people and the pensioners, which brings enormous damage to the state budget.

It seems that the public in Serbia has not paid enough attention to the other remarks of the European Commission but the discussion was brought to the story about what the term “territorial integrity” means. And in the Report are given numerous and serious remarks about the state in the Serbian society, that are preventing it from further development and progress. As it has often been in its history, in Serbia is much more energy spent on symbols rather than on the arrangement of the people lives and creating of normal society.



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That is why the Government has to try to quickly and efficiently, with painful compromises solve the problem of Kosovo, in order to turn to the arrangement of the society, strengthening the democratic institutions and procedures, to the improvement of the citizens' standards, and enabling of the better life. If not being so, neither in Serbia nor on Kosovo any kind of territorial integrity is not going to be of any worth.