

SPRECHEN SIE DEUTSCH?

The highest officials of Serbian Government, the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić and the first Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić found themselves this week at the same time in Brussels and Berlin trying to convince European and German officials that Serbia should receive the date of the beginning of joining negotiations for the membership in the European Union (EU). Synchronized onset of these two politicians who do not quite agree concerning all questions while at home, clearly points out how important this question for Serbian Government is. The Government of Serbia , chosen almost seven months ago , determined as one of its prior tasks – the membership of Serbia in the European Union. In the previous months, new cabinet was determiningly removing all the obstacles which the European Union, and specially Germany, remarked as the barrier to the beginning of joining negotiations of Serbia about the membership in the European Union because it was clear that it wants the beginning of the negotiation to be its first big foreign politics success. The administration that was led by the former President of Serbia Boris Tadić in the period from 2008. till 2012. also had the process of the European integrations as its main priority .Honestly speaking, in that period happened a great formal advance in the relations between Serbia and the European Union. On April 29th 2008. were signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement of Serbia and the European Union (SSP) and Interim Trade Agreement (PTS). On January 1st 2009. Serbia started unilaterally applying Interim Trade Agreement while for the European Union it started being valid from December 7th of the same year. On June 14th 2010. the European Union started the process of ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement in the Parliaments of the member countries of the European Union, and the European Parliament adopted this Agreement on January 19th 2011. In the meantime, on December 22nd 2009., with the opposition og Germany (which insisted it to be done after the applying of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement) ,Serbia applied for the membership in the European Union and the European Council after more that two years , on March 1st 2012., made the decision to assign Serbia the status of candidate for the membership in the European Union. Since December 19th 2009. visa-free regime of Serbia toward the European Union has been applied and the citizens of Serbia can freely travel in the countries of the European Union. To Tadić's administration can not be denied persistence and wish to achieve the „ European agenda“ meaning that Serbia is advancing towards the membership in the European Union. The form obviously was not desputable but the problems emerged when the essence became important. Namely, the closer one country gets to the European Union, the more serious inner reforms it has to achieve including the demonopolisation of the economy, politics and society, the development of the democratic institutions and the creating of the efficient administration and the legal state. The former government was ready to provide the inner reforms only to the point where they would not endanger the non-constitutional control of the former President Boris Tadić and his closest surrounding over Serbian politics, media, society and economy.

It was best seen in the cases of already mentioned Judiciary reform against which stood up the whole Europe, in the case of trying of adopting a new Law on public tenders without the approval of the experts with harsh opposition of the European Union, in the cases of controlling of media, and not solving the cases of high corruption.

All these problems, together with not fulfilling the agreement between Belgrade and Priština achieved at the negotiations under the patronage of the European Union, quite much burdened relations of Serbia with the European Union (specially with Germany), so that the country could no longer progress in the process of European integrations. It was the situation that was inherited by the current Government elected at the end of July 2012.

The problems Serbia had with the European Union were in connection with the relations of Belgrade and Berlin. The former President Tadić did not quite well understand the importance of Germany in the European family of nations allowing (consciously or not) Serbian representatives to promise to Berlin one thing and do something else. Misunderstanding of these two countries culminated in September 2011. when German Chancellor Angela Merkel at her visit to Belgrade taught Serbian authorities a public lesson by announcing clear demands in front of Serbia if it was willing to become the member of the European Union. To then current Serbian authorities had only then become clear that German demands towards Serbia were actually European. Until then recent foreign politics, formed in the cabinet of the former President, which included the attempts of Serbia to communicate with several European Capitals at the same time and play the cards of separations in the European Union concerning the admittance of Kosovo – came to a failure. Tadić's administration faced firm demands of Berlin concerning Kosovo and it became clear that without the progress in negotiations with Priština there would not be a candidacy of Serbia for the membership in the European Union as well as the beginning of negotiations. The moment when the former Government realised the situation could not have been worse. The country was only less than a year far from the elections where to then leading coalition „ the successes in European integrations“ should have been the main trump. In that situation, Tadić made a new mistake. He was trying to achieve expected agreements with Priština only that Serbia could receive the status of the candidate for the membership in the European Union, meaning because of the elections – without a real wish and strength to fulfill these agreements!?! This behaviour seriously endangered credibility of Serbia and its political representatives all over the world. Exactly there lies the answer to the question that former President even today has been searching for – why not even one person from the international community regretted his losing the elections and giving the government to someone else? The answer is simple. No one needs an unreliable partner who lacks the honest wish to reform his society, who brings the state decisions to be compatible with marketing plans and not with wishes of citizens, and who is not capable of providing the decisions made by himself.

Just because of that, new Government had to prove immediately to the European Union that it was trustworthy partner and to regain lost credibility in the international community. It was done by energetic achievement at the exterior of everything that the previous government agreed concerning Kosovo. They managed in doing so and Serbia regained the trust again. Besides, new Serbian leaders showed that they understood how important for the future of Serbia relationships with Germany were as well as to finally solve the issue of Kosovo.

Concerning the relations with Germany, in Belgrade it became clear that Serbian road to Brussels leads via Berlin, meaning that Germany is the crucial country for Serbia, for our progress to the European Union and solving the problem of Kosovo. That is why the first Deputy Prime Minister in the Government Aleksandar Vučić in the previous period did very much in order to improve the relations of Serbia and Germany.

Concerning the question of Kosovo, the actual Government showed a good will that during its mandate permanently solve this open question that has been burdening Serbia for the decades. New Government, thus, immediately started negotiations with Priština at the highest level led by the Prime Ministers of Serbia and Kosovo Ivica Dačić and Hashim Tachi and showed that it wanted a compromise and permanent solution. We are talking about completely new politics. By improving the relations with Germany and permanently solving the problem of Kosovo, current Serbian Government is making historical steps for Serbia by enabling its future and the place in the international community no matter if Serbia is going to become the member of the European Union or not.

Germany as the main ally in that process is logical choice for Serbia if its political leaders are following their sense and economic interests of the country, do not live in the past and are not under pressure of myths. Because even if we neglect the German strength and influence on European politics, this country is for Serbia the most important economic partner. In Germany work over half of the million Serbs who, even in the time of the worst economic crisis, sent to Serbia over 1,5 billion euros annually. On the basis of the projects started in the year 2012 in the industrial sector, in Serbia are expected the investments of German companies of around 450 million euros and the opening of around five thousand new working places. In Serbia today work around 360 enterprises which capital originates from Germany and which employ around 20 thousand workers. Due to the producing of German companies in Serbia, the value of Serbian export in this country already covers 62 per cent of the import from this country. There is quite certain possibility that Serbia in the year 2012. record a maximum export to Germany for the last eleven years, higher than the last record from 2008. when from our country to Germany was exported 766,35 million euros worth goods. German companies in Serbia have invested since the year 2000. until now around billion and a half euros. Berlin is to Serbia most important European bilateral donor because since 2000. until today it has given almost 870 million euros.

That is why it is absolutely logical that Germany becomes not only the most important Serbian economic but also political partner as well. Political relations of Belgrade and Berlin were very good in the period 2000- 2003. year while on the head of Serbian Government was Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić, killed in an assassination. As a German student, he was one of the rare Serbian politicians in modern history that was familiar with German politics, he was aware of the strength of German economy, and understood what the international position of Germany was going to be in Europe in the century we were living in. Still, in the relations between Serbia and Germany through the history were larger number of difficult than good periods. Djindjić's trial to establish strategic partnership of Belgrade and Berlin was stopped by his assassination and the leaders that have led Serbia after his death, all to the election of the actual Government, did not have such a close relationship with Germany and did not consider that Serbia should have any. By coming of Aleksandar Vučić in the Government that situation has changed, because he is the first Serbian politician, after Zoran Djindjić, who realises the importance and the strength of Germany and the chance for Serbia if it establish strategic partnership with this country.

That is why in the following years could be expected much better relations of Belgrade and Berlin because it is in the best interest of both countries.

Serbian interest obviously exists to cooperate with the most powerful country in Europe, and German interest consists of the fact that without Serbia, as the central country of the Balkans, it is not possible to establish permanent peace and stability in this part of Europe, solve the crossing borders and national conflicts and stabilize the countries which were formed after the separation of former Yugoslavia. That is why Serbia now has got a historical chance that through the partnership with Berlin stabilize its state and find its place in European family of nations. It can be noticed that Vučić sees this chance quite clearly and there is an impression that he is determined not to step up. Germany and Serbia are also connected with one more thing – special relations with Russia. Serbian public almost do not know how close economic and political relations of Berlin and Moscow are. It is, let us say, pipeline Nord Stream (which president of the General Board is former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder) directly connected, across the sea, these two countries avoiding several countries – members of the European Union. Strong economical relations follow the political so that Germany at a time prevented Ukraine and Georgia to become the members of NATO because it was in an opposition to Russian interests. So, the mutual relation towards Russia is something that connects Serbia and Germany although the reasons for this cooperation are far more different. Germany and Russia, two maybe the most important countries of Europe, have got the strategic cooperation based on economic interests which is slowly growing into the political partnership. Serbia has primarily got the emotional relation towards Russia, which is only recently slowly growing into the economic one.

In Serbian society there is no clear awareness about where it comes such an interest of Germany for Western Balkans from? It is mostly understood as the support to the independence of Kosovo in which Germany considers that Kosovo's side is right and that on Serbian should be put some pressure to admit the independence of Priština. This understanding is the part of the stereotype about Germany, that exists in Serbian society. The facts, however, speak differently. Germany has, in behalf of the European Union and the United States of America, which means with complete approval of leading western allies, taken over the obligation to solve as fast as possible as many open questions as possible in south-eastern Europe, some of which, (first of all Kosovo), can again endanger the safety of the continent. Germany admits the independence of Kosovo because it does not, as most of other countries, see other solution but strongly supports the dialogue between Belgrade and Priština and is ready to accept every solution that Serbs and Albanians agree about. Differently from some other countries (USA, Great Britain..) German is quite critical towards Kosovo's politics, society, connections with organized criminal and the government and the inability of Kosovo's government to build up prosperous society. It is written about these topics quite often in German press, and German state departments warn Kosovo's representatives that they have to show the progress in these fields. The leaders of Kosovo can expect the support of Germany concerning the independence but they are going to have a lot of problems with this country if they do not find themselves ready to maintain serious inner reforms, to struggle against the criminal and the corruption, to judge for war crimes, to build up a legal state and independent institutions.

Besides, out of more than 5,000 soldiers of KFOR (the international military protecting forces on Kosovo) German contingent of almost 900 soldiers is second large. German public is most sensitive to the including of German soldiers in military operations out of the German territory because of its hard history in the past. That is exactly why the German Government has to pay special attention to the solving of the problem of Kosovo, and not to, by its single movement, endanger the safety of its soldiers in the field.

Germany has got one more obligation towards this problem because KFOR is traditionally always under the commandship of German general. So, Germany apart from soldiers has got the special responsibility for the situation on Kosovo so that the wish of this country to solve permanently Serbian and Albanian conflict about Kosovo is natural. And finally, solving of the problem at western Balkans , especially Kosovo's one, is a serious test for the German foreign politics which is through this region coming back triumphantly in the world's diplomacy in which it has been present for years without any initiative having in mind German history. That is why this question is important for Germany because coming back into the world's diplomacy and successful solving of the problem can qualify Germany to receive the place the position it deserves for a long time now concerning the economy and the influence in the world – the position of the permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations.

Serbian public should understand that Germany like this can be strong and reliable ally of Serbia concerning the solving of Kosovo's problem , which has strenght and the will to force Albanian leaders to aquire what they accepted to do.

German foreign politics is sometimes „ robust“ but with it you always know where you are standing. Serbia was able to experience it through positive as well as negative examples. That is, for example, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle in August 2010. clearly announced to then current Serbian head that if they should continue insisting on adopting the Resolution about the Opinion of the International Court of Justice concerning Kosovo and in the General Assembly of the United Nations without the agreement with the European Union – they should freely forget about the European integrations. The former President Tadić learned seriously this warning and immediately withdrew the resolution and applied a new one – together with the European Union. We have already written about the critics that German Chancellor Angela Merkel publicly pointed to the former Serbian head administration in Belgrade a year later. On the other hand, German Minister Westerwelle knew at the beginning of the last year to warn sharply Romania not to block candidacy of Serbia for the membership in the European Union because of the question of Vlachs of Serbia minority. So, with Germany things are clear – it is good to have it as a friend and bad to be on the opposite side of it.

Serbia chose the right way when it decided to closely cooperate with Germany as well as to finally solve the problem of Kosovo. That is why it can be expected that Serbia in June, despite all the problems, start negotiations about the membership in the European Union even if all these questions opened at this moment stay unsolved. First, actual Government has in less than seven months of governing the country maintained „ seven miles“ steps and solved almost all opened questions with the European Union. Then, it has shown strong political will to finally solve the problem of Kosovo, and then strength to fulfill all that was arranged. When that kind of government should stay without the date of the biggining negotiations, that would mean that Brussles and Berlin were destabilizing it which is not their interest.

Besides, the lack of the beginning of negotiations would lead to the further fall of Euro-enthusiasm in Serbia and could strengthen the pressure of public on the Government (which has not been in majority for months concerning the entering of Serbia into the European Union) to give up the European integrations. If that would happen, European Union and Berlin would not have almost any means of pressuring on Belgrade. In that case, the question is which way further dialogue about Kosovo would lead?

It is quite strong trump in the hands of Serbian Government and there is an impression that the Prime Minister Dačić and Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić use it very skillfully when they talk how Serbia can not accept all that has been asked of it, meaning that it can not endanger its national interests.

That is why the determining of the date for the beginning of negotiations between Serbia and the European Union imposes as the only logical solution. Specially if it is known that also the process of joining of one country does not control the European Union but 27 member countries (this year the member of the European Union is about to become Croatia and there are going to be 28 of them) which decide about every movement during the process of joining. Thus, when the negotiations begin, still there are plenty of possibilities for blocking of the joining process in every moment. The negotiations are, however, separated into 35 chapters and at the beginning and at the end of each of them countries members of the European Union give their opinion about whether they concern that the country which wants to become a member country of the European Union fulfilled all that was predicted by that chapter about negotiations or not. That is why this process is not possible to pass if behind the country – candidate does not stand some of the biggest members of the European Union which has got the strength to put pressure on smaller countries members of the European Union if problems emerge such as in the case of Romanian request for Serbia not to receive the candidate country status until it solves the problem of Vlach minority or in the case of Slovenian request that Croatia should be blocked in the joining the European Union until it solves the problem of crossing borders in Piran Bay in the Adriatic Sea. The rule is simple, if the most powerful members of the European Union such are Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain or Italy have got positive attitude towards Serbia it is going to make progress in negotiations. If it should not be so – Serbia is not going to become the member of the European Union.

In the following period Serbia is going to face serious decisions as announced Aleksandar Vučić after the meeting in Berlin. There is an impression that the Government , as almost not any one before it , aware of all advances and restrictions this country has got, the international position in which Serbia is now, the necessity of solving the problem of Kosovo, and what is most important the need to apply deep inner reforms that are going to demonopolise Serbian society. If the Government should manage in that, it is less important whether Serbia is going to become the member of the European Union despite having a concensus in Serbian politics that the membership in the European Union is in the interest of Serbia. That is why in the following period Serbian Government is going to need mobilisation of the whole society around historical processes that are happening now because great things in history can not be done in the narrow group of people. That period is the last chance for Serbia to stabilize as the state, to reform itself, to find its place in the world and to turn itself to the development and the future instead to the past.