

THE BATTLE FOR THE SECOND PLACE

Are new early parliamentary elections going to be held in Serbia only six months after constituting the Government is the question that is emerging in public as well as among the politicians in the last few months.

The Government of Serbia has in the past six months worked without any greater problems. All its law suggestions, including the budget for 2013., were adopted in the Assembly with convincing parliamentary majority. New cabinet maintained all agreements achieved in „ technical negotiations“ between Belgrade and Priština under the patronage of the European Union, which former Government did not even try to do. Besides, the negotiations with Priština have been brought from technical to the political level because the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić has had meetings several times with the Prime Minister of Kosovo Hashim Tachi and this month should be held the first meeting of Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić and the President of Kosovo Atifete Jahjaga. The meetings of the highest Serbian and Kosovo representatives are not protocolar but during the meetings the arrangements which serve to ease the lives of ordinary people are to be achieved. During six months Government managed to remove the obstacles for further development of Serbia in the process of European integrations because of which this country did not receive the date of the beginning of joining negotiations about the membership in the European Union. These are the appliance of achieved agreements concerning Kosovo and starting of political negotiations, the abolishing of the judiciary reform provided by the former Government and active struggle against corruption and strengthening of the independent institutions that make this struggle more efficient and successful. In all these areas has been achieved significant progress. The judiciary reform was abolished and the struggle against the corruption that is carried out by the first Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of the strongest governing party in the country Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Aleksandar Vučić also produced significant results. It has been returned the importance to the significant state institutions such are National Assembly and the Government that were at the time of the previous Government completely in the function of the cabinet of the Serbian President. It can be noticed that in the best case Serbia has got better understanding , if not even better relations, with the United States of America (USA) and Germany. The relations of Belgrade with the closest state Montenegro have been improved , towards which the administration of the former President Boris Tadić provided an unreasonable politics allowing itself to interfere into the inner questions of that country. That the Government politics was successful prove the results of the questioning of public opinion according to which every third examinee trusts the Government. However, the greatest challenge cabinet of the Prime Minister Dačić is facing is the economy. The fact is that the large number of Government pre-electoral promises have been fulfilled meaning the abolishing of many excises that were burdening the economy and specially small and medium enterprises for which can be mostly thanked to the Minister of Finance Mladjan Dinkić. It can be noticed that the Government turned to the attracting of the foreign investments from the countries that have got the money – Russia, China, Arabian world and India.

It specially applies to the efforts of the Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić to establish the economy cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that already gives results. It is obvious that citizens are going to, despite all that has been done, form their judgement about the work of the Government , among other things, concerning the fact whether their living standard is better or not. So, despite the fact that in the country everything is not ideal, the members of the Government that achieved such results in only six months and that have got the trust of one third of citizens should open a champagne. Instead, in Serbia as well as in the very Government, there emerges a story about the elections. The reason for the story about the early elections is the latest affair in which the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić was brought into the connection with a certain individual who is later accused of smuggling drugs. Namely, Dačić met that individual several times at the time when he was on the position of the Minister of Inner Affairs in the previous Government when that person was not accused of anything but was tracked by the police. In the similar context was mentioned the former chief of Dačić's cabinet , Branko Lazarević, who suddenly in 2010. was sent in Serbian embassy in Athens. The Prime Minister himself rejected these accusations by saying that the affair was created because of the elections of the police chief, because the events are from five years ago and everyone knew about it, for starting this affair some media accused very powerful Deputy President of the Democratic Party (DS) and former coordinator of all Serbian security services Miodrag Rakić stating that this way he is trying to destabilize the Government and cause early elections and there are those claiming that the accusations are serious and that they discredit Dačić at the position of the Prime Minister. But, however, - this affair can not cause the fall of the Government. It can only be formal cause as it is possible to find any other. For the fall of Dačić's cabinet there have to exist political reasons, and the decision about whether there are going to be early elections or not is in the hands of the strongest party which the elections can be suitable to – Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Whether Serbian Progressive Party is going to bring such a decision depends mostly on the political relations inside the Government.

So, the story about the elections is the consequence of the relations in the Government that are created at the time of its constituting. Namely, actual Serbian Government was formed in a way that several smaller parties such are Socialists Party of Serbia (SPS) of the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, the United Regions of Serbia (URS) of the Minister of Finance Mladjan Dinkić, as well as the Social-Democratic Party (SDP) of Minister of Trade Rasim Ljajić decided not to constitute the new Government with until then their coalitional partner Democratic Party (then led by the former President of Serbia Boris Tadić and now led by the Mayor of Belgrade Dragan Djilas) but with the party that won most votes at the elections and which current leader won the elections for the President of Serbia , Serbian Progressive Party which is led now by the first Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić. The key role in that turnover played the socialists (popular name for the Socialists Party of Serbia) and their leader Dačić. Exactly because of that, as well as because of the fact that without his party the Government could not be possible, Dačić became the Prime Minister. The leader of the greatest party in the coalition Vučić became the Deputy Prime Minister. The fact that the leader of the smaller party in the coalition becomes the Prime Minister of the Government is not common but it can happen in parliamentary democracies. It happened in Serbia in 2007. when the democrates (popular name for the Democratic Party) which then current leader Boris Tadić was the President of Serbia left the position of the Prime Minister to the leader of the smaller party , Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) – Vojislav Koštunica.

The reason was the same as in the case of Dačić five years later. Koštunica and his party could choose who was going to be in the Government – the democrates or then right wing , nationalistic party Serbian Radical Party (SRS) which today is not even in the Parliament. That is why the price was too high. So, such Governments in which the leader of the smaller party is formally at its head are possible. Still, they most often depend on personal relations of the two strongest political leaders. If these relations are correct , meaning if they agree about the priorities and if the government is not losing its popularity – these kind of cabinets can last for the whole mandate. Koštunica's cabinet did not last just because of this reason , because he and then current leader of the Democratic Party had different attitude towards the Kosovo's politics and thus different priorities. Dačić's cabinet is also today on a serious testing.

The actual Government managed to gain a great citizens' trust in a quite short time. Before all due to the fight against the corruption led in the Government by the leader of the progressives (popular name for the Serbian Progressive Party SNS) Vučić. It is the most important reason why the popularity of the progressives has been vertiginously rising during all these months so that this party according to various researches support more than 35 per cent of the citizens. Usually parties which enter the Government lose their rating they achieved at the elections because they are forced while governing the country to manage the unpopular measures which are necessary for the country to function. The rising of the governing party's rating is happening very rarely but the progressives who managed to do so naturally want to keep it so. Whether they are going to be successful in it mostly depends on the work of the Government in which they do not have the Prime Minister. It is exactly where lies the potential danger for the survival of the Government because the progressives have the interest to stay in the Government only if it brings the results in all areas – from the progress in the process of European integrations via economy and living standard to the struggle against the corruption. In short, while the Government is doing a good work and realises the priorities, it is going to have the support of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). This is the fact that their most important representatives have confirmed publicly several times so far. And it is a point where we go back to the previous story about the importance of the personal relationship among the leaders in the Government concerning the agreement about what the mutual priorities should be.

There exists another reason why the elections would be suitable for the progressives. Namely, this party does not almost have any opposition, nor the oppositional parties can expect any favorable result at new elections. The biggest oppositional party ,Democratic Party, has , after losing the elections, gone through harsh inner party struggle for the position of the President, that ended in compromise between former and actual President and for now it has proved to be wrong for that political organisation. The agreement of former President of Democratic Party Boris Tadić and actual President Dragan Djilas according to which the former President has become the honoured President of the party but in all sectors of the party he determined half of the members and detained separation of the party between the two of them but he paralised it and slowed it down. In the Democratic Party today is governing the dual power and ,as it can be noticed today, is hardly going to avoid the separation. The request of new President Djilas that all former ministers resign the positions of the representatives in the Parliament for which he gained the support of the General Board of the party brought to the new crisis in the party.

Most of the former ministers accepted this request but not the former Deputy President of the party Dušan Petrović and popular former Minister of Foreign Affairs and now the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations Vuk Jeremić. Democratic Party excluded Petrović and gave a short term to Jeremić to accept the decision of the party. The exclusion of these two is going to bring new problems to Democratic Party. Petrović was the Deputy President of the party for nine years and in years before that he was the president of various authorities and the representative in the Parliament. He was the only one who was dealing with the party structure organisation in Democratic Party for years and he has got great influence on people who work for the party on court , specially in the western Serbia. His leaving could bring a serious harm to the organisation of the Democratic Party and to reduce the chances of this party at some future elections because the party infrastructure can not be renewed in one day. It is hard-working and long-lasting work in which best people should be found to represent the party in particular local communities. The power of big parties (in Serbia today these are Serbian Progressive Party SNS, Democratic Party DS and Socialists Party of Serbia SPS) lies in thousands of hundreds well organised members and party infrastructure which enables first party to reach every voter and transfer its political messages, and then to all who truly support that party really come out to the elections. That something is not right with the infrastructure of the Democratic Party was already notable at the previous elections when in the second round of the presidential elections the progressives won only due to the power of the party structure organisation concerning that they were in media blockade and under the pressure of negative campaign of then current Government. After leaving the Government democrates lost almost three thousand members , dismissed dozens of municipal boards so that party infrastructure is today weaker than it was at the previous elections. The leaving of Petrović is going to bring additional damage to the party infrastructure of Democratic Party and it is quite clear that it would reflect on the electoral results if there would be scheduled early elections during 2013. Possible exclusion of Jeremić would cause another kind of damage to Democratic Party because we are talking about popular politician who is also the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. What kind of political ambitions does he have is still not known but his survival in Serbian politics , either in some of already existing parties or in a new one, would bring a damage to the Democratic Party. There is an impression that current leaders are hurrying to exclude him being aware that the position of the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations which lasts until September does not enable him to actively deals with the politics in Serbia. Because of all above mentioned the perspective of the Democratic Party, separated between the two formal leaders and with powerful Deputy President Miodrag Rakić, who obviously wants to control both of them from the shadow, is under a big question. The party does not have anymore strength to put upon themes to the public and to change Serbia. It was notable when the Democratic Party promoted its new programme as well as department boards that were suppose to be some kind of „Government from the shadow“. It was being announced for months as the most important issue in the party and the beginning of the oppositional campaign but the news about that lasted only one day?

Only a few days later the Deputy President of the party Rakić is in the interview for one weekly news in which he spoke about the drug clan of Darko Šarić (drug clan that consisted of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro and that was broken thanks to the cooperation of Serbia, Montenegro, the USA and more than dozen other countries in the time of the Government of the Democratic Party) threw that topic completely aside. It tells that even the leaders of that party themselves do not have the same priorities. However, it appears not to be the greatest problem of the Democratic Party. There is an impression that the party being preoccupied with its own problems, affairs from the governing time and inner party conflicts has lost the character of the great party which strives to be the strongest, to govern the country and to maintain its programme. Today the Democratic Party only wants to be the second because the first place of the progressives at the next elections is doubtless. It was confirmed by the president of the Democratic Party Djilas when he asking for the early elections said that „ new government will not be possible without the Democratic Party „ and not that the Democratic Party would constitute it what would say every leader of the great party. Djilas also forgets that political experience tells that the strongest party easier creates coalition with the party that is third in a line than with the one which is the second positioned.

So, the progressives have really got various possibilities. They enjoy quite big popularity, they have got the President of the Republic and real power in the country, they can enter the coalition with almost every parliamentary party in Serbia, they have got the opposition which does not have the ambition to endanger them but to be minor partner in the future Government and they can choose the time when they want new elections. Frankly speaking, Serbian Progressive Party today has got bigger opponents in some media and a part on non-governmental sector and cultural public rather than in political parties. This kind of oppositon every party can only wish for, and Serbian Progressive Party for it can be thankful to their leader Aleksandar Vučić who showed that he matured in a politician, that he understands politics quite well, changes that happen in the world and that he is one of the rare politicians who has got the idea how to change Serbian society, or to „modernize“ it as he usually says lately.

Still, the position of the progressives is not without threats. As the party that is in expansion, it grows fast and when it happens mistakes are inevitable. These mistakes are not visible now because of the popularity of the party and its leader, but it does not mean that there will not be any problems for the Serbian Progressive Party in the future. It is notable that political opponents of the progressives as well as particular media and non-governmental sector are trying to create an image in public that Serbian Progressive Party does not have enough educated staff for the responsible positions in the country. This way is created the base for the campaign against the progressives at next elections. To that campaign the progressives can only answer with hard work, promotion of their staff at state positions and introducing the citizens with their work. For that they need time and successful Government and not quick elections. Besides, the leader of the progressives Aleksandar Vučić has shown so far that he is the politician who knows that „ governing the country is a serious work“. Last politicians of that kind were in the assassination killed Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić and former President of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (mutual country of Serbia and Montenegro which existed from 1992. To 2003.) and Prime Minister of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica. Those who led Serbia after them mostly considered that the position they attain serves for personal promotion and that the politician does not need to have politics but to decide what to do according to the research of the public opinion.

Vučić knows quite well the condition Serbia is into and he understands that new elections mean another lost year for the economy, accumulation of debts and increasing of public costs because the country is spending more than it possesses. The fact is that scheduling the elections would stop all processes that have been started, from the struggle against the corruption to the negotiations with Kosovo's Government and the process of European integrations. Situation in which the country would bring itself after the elections held would be even more difficult than it is today. Thus, the citizens have to be convinced that the continuing of the work of actual Government would bring more harm to the state than the stagnation that would happen during the elections in order to accept the decision about the elections rationally. Specially if it is known that the changes in the Government, if necessary, are possible without the elections because Serbian Progressive Party can constitute the majority with some other parties without Socialist Party of Serbia.

Finally, emerges the question what would be the reaction of the international community to early elections in Serbia? The impression is that Moscow as well as Washington, Berlin and Brussels are satisfied with new Serbian Government. The strongest countries of the world will not interfere in the question whether Serbia needs new elections or recomposition of the Government, but they are quite interested in continuing of the process of negotiations between Belgrade and Priština that would certainly be stopped until the constitution of the new Government. Serbia could not account on the date of beginning of negotiations about joining the European Union in the year 2013. Exactly it is the reason why, until the negotiations with Priština are going well and while Serbia has got the chance to receive the date of the beginning the negotiations about joining the European Union, the chances for holding the early elections are very small.

Still, possible decision about the elections in Serbia is political, which means that all scenarios are possible. Whether these election stay regular in 2016. or early, they would be the least uncertain in modern Serbian democratic history. The winner of the elections is known and other parties are going to fight for the second or the third place lowering prices to each other while entering the Government. These are for now first political consequences of tectonic disorder on Serbian political scene that emerged after defeat of democrates at the elections held in May 2012. and problems in which this party found itself after defeat and haste rising of the progressives who has become the leading political strength of Serbia.