



THE ENDLESS GAME

The surprising winning of the leader of the Serbian opposition, the president of the Serbian Progressive Party, Tomislav Nikolić at the Serbian presidential elections has completely changed relations on the political scene of the country.

Nikolić's triumph was equally a surprise for all politicians and well-informed people about political situation in Serbia as for his own voters. After the general elections held on the sixth of May when Nikolić's party won most of the votes it was quite clear that the leading Democratic Party (DS) of the former President of Serbia Boris Tadić is going to form governance with its so far coalitional partners and to constitute the Government. If we add the fact that Tadić managed to win a bit more votes than Nikolić in the first electoral round as well as the fact that the democrates (public name for the Democratic Party) won cogently the elections in the capital city of Belgrade , led by the popular mayor Dragan Djilas as well as that they again won the power in the north Serbian province of Vojvodina – things were not quite good for the progressives (public name for the Serbian Progressive Party). The Serbian Progressive Party would have been at the edge of political abyss if its candidate Nikolić had lost the presidential elections in the second round. Then it is really a question how this party, formed on the expectations it would take over the government on the first upcoming elections , could survive for years as the opposition , meaning would it stay unique and strongest oppositional party ?

That is the reason why, between the two presidential electoral rounds, in Serbian public and media has been created an atmosphere that the second electoral round has only been a matter of formality , meaning that the candidate of the democrates Tadić surely wins the elections with great difference. This belief has been additionally amplified by the public announcement of the agreement of Tadić's democratic party arranged with the socialists (public name for the Socialists Party of Serbia SPS) that immediately after Tadić's triumph they would constitute the government. It is exactly where the key of Nikolić's winning lies – the party of former Serbian President Boris Tadić believed that it was going to win in the second round of the presidential elections easily and without any efforts. As a rule, this kind of self-confidence leads to the defeat.

When we are talking about direct electoral duels of the two candidates, there is only one rule – wins the one who motivates more of his voters to come out to the elections. In these situations videos, messages of the candidates, negative campaign, support, appearance all become less important ..The progressives have chosen between the two electoral rounds very risky way to consolidate the support of its electorate by actuating the campaign about the electoral stealing in the first round of the presidential elections. By this campaign and radicalization of their appearance they have lost a part of moderate voters but they anchored among their voters as well as among the voters of the candidates with similar political orientations who did not enter the second electoral round.



Popularly saying, they offered to their voters the excuse for low result in the first round and motivated them strongly to come out to the second electoral round in order to stop the government to „ steal the votes once again „. Technically, the progressives have done the only thing they could between the two electoral rounds , they played risky, motivated their own voters and hoped for low response to the voting because only thus they could win. And they won.

The answer of the democrates to this tactics was thus that they played the game of the progressives and helped them to win. First, it is never going to be quite clear how the electoral commissions did not notice for a few days the missing of ten sacks with the electoral ballots ? This improvidence of the democrates led them to the situation that upon showing the sacks to the public as the key evidence of the electoral stealing they had to turn their campaign into the approving not to be thieves. As to make things even worse for the democrates, the first few days only President Tadić defended the party in the public. Still, it was not the key situation that brought Tadić to the final defeat. The only possible answer of the democrates to the tactic of the progressive was to create in public the atmosphere of the uncertain race between Nikolić and Tadić and thus motivate their voters to come out to the elections in large number. They did something completely different. They were sending messages , consciously or unknowingly, to the voters that the second round was „ just formality „. Is it possible to explain in any other way the news that „the betting offices nullified the possibility of betting in the second round of presidential elections because Tadić is winning out of a doubt.“ They were certain that the winning is going to happen by itself and thus sent the message to their voters who were doubtful whether to come out to the second round of the presidential elections that Tadić was going to win even without their votes. ?! However, let us leave the electoral messages aside and who played whose games. It all has had a certain influence but we already mentioned that in the direct duel of the two candidates the key question was – have you managed to bring all your voters to the electoral polls? This fact reveals the condition in which the party’s organisation is. The democrates simply did not manage to bring all their voters to the elections and that is the reason why they lost the elections. It approved that the party’s organisation of the Democratic Party far made by the assassinated Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić at the end of nineties of the last century , that overthrew the former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević and was bringing the triumphs to the Democratic Party at the elections – is no longer the advantage of the democrates. This party’s infrastructure has been neglected for years and it is beaten to the bottom now by the party’s organisation of the Serbian Progressive Party led by the agile president deputy of this party Aleksandar Vučić , Serbian politician with probably most experience concerning technical organisation of electoral campaign.

So, the progressives managed to bring each one of their voters to the elections, democrates did not manage to do so. Today Nikolić is the President of Serbia and Tadić lost the elections.

Nikolić’s winning has saved the Serbian Progressive Party and enabled it the future, meaning the possibility to progress, develop and gain even greater support from its followers. Despite Nikolić’s winning still the chances are minimal for the progressives to constitute the Government. It could be possible to happen only in the case of great conflicts inside the Democratic Party that would enable this party to take part in the Government .



However, the question is whether it is necessary for the progressives at all to take part in the Government at this moment? The economic situation in Serbia is very difficult, the national currency dinar has been losing its value every day, the appreciated economic world experts predict that Serbia is going to face difficult situation if Greece abandon Euro zone because of the high presence of Greek banks in Serbia, there is not any new agreements with the IMF arranged, the investors do not have any trust in the state, and new Government is going to face a whole line of unpopular measures ranging from raising Value Added Taxes, raising the price of electricity, to the unpopular measures such as lessening the public cost. As the President of the Republic, Nikolić is not going to share any responsibility with the Government and is going to do only nice and promotional things – meeting with the leaders of other countries, he is going to be in a position to share advice and moral lectures and to promote his politics concerning certain questions in which he is going to be in conflict with the Government. In all countries without presidential system the Presidents are always the most popular which means that if Nikolić does not do anything unpredictable he does not have to face any worries concerning his political future. Besides, being on a position of the President Nikolić is taking away the democrates' most important weapon they could use against him and his party and that is – people being afraid he is going to turn the country back to the nineties of the last century marked by wars and sanctions as well as the fear that no one in the world is going to cooperate with Nikolić, meaning he is going to take the country into isolation.

These fears naturally were not justified, but the Democratic Party played successfully on that card and used to maintain electoral winnings over Nikolić as well as over his party. Now, when citizens can see that Nikolić's triumph does not mean any chaos in the country, that world leaders can cooperate with him normally and that Serbia is not coming back to the isolation, sanctions and wars – Democratic Party does not have any weapons that could help it win the progressives at some future elections. Simply, Nikolić's party has got a highway to the Government at the future elections provided it play on the card of its leader as the President of Serbia and on dissatisfaction of citizens by work of the Government that is most likely going to be governed by the Democratic Party.

Tadić's defeat has seriously staggered the Democratic Party. Only a few months after becoming the president of the Democratic Party in February 2004. Tadić became the President of Serbia. These two functions he performed simultaneously and the authority of the President of the state helped him to firmly lead his party which based its success on his popularity. Now, when he is no longer the President of Serbia it approved to be quite bad for the party that it did not have its own autonomous life, discussions about most important questions and maybe a president.

How is it possible to explain in any other way that today Democratic Party is having a problem despite winning the elections in Belgrade, Vojvodina and most of the cities in Serbia and has got the opportunity to constitute the Government, only because its president has lost the elections for the least important function in the state?

Tadić now has got only two possibilities – to resign due to the electoral defeat and abandon politics or to try as new Prime Minister of Serbia to constitute the Government out of coalitional partners of Democratic Party with which he has already made a raw agreement after the first round of presidential elections. What is Tadić going to decide depends on the fact whether he still wants to be the president of the party. If he wants to stay the president of the party Tadić simply has to become the Prime Minister. On contrary, he would only be protocolar president who would not have the power to control his party's representatives who are going to work at important state functions.

As a paradox, Tadić's resignation is something that no one of his deputy presidents is wishing for! The reason is not that they believe Tadić's staying as the head of the Democratic Party is good for the party but because they believe it is good for them. If Tadić would resign, then the government in the party would go to the hands of his deputy – the mayor of Belgrade Dragan Djilas. The negotiations concerning the constitution of the Government would be led by him and that would mean he would have to be new Prime Minister. It does not fit into Djilas' plans because he wants to be the mayor of Belgrade for one more mandate, and then in four years to become the Prime Minister. Simply, Djilas is aware that the next Prime Minister is going to be unpopular because of the economic crisis, and thus he wants to spend that time „protected „ on the position of the mayor of Belgrade where he would save his popularity and rating for some better times. The similar plans has got the other deputy president being the president of the Government of Autonomy Province of Vojvodina (The autonomy Province of Vojvodina is situated on the north of Serbia and is, besides Belgrade, the most developed part of Serbia) Bojan Pajtić. He also wants to spend the next period in Vojvodina and to save his chances for the next elections. The other deputy presidents wants Tadić to stay on the head of the party as well as to lead the Government only for one reason – that the party does not go into the hands of Djilas or Pajtić. It is more suitable for them that weakened Tadić lead the unpopular government than new fresh energy with new president. Of course, they expect that their chances for overtaking the party are going to be bigger in four years rather than today.

Tadić has to take care about the condition he is going to left the Democratic Party in if he decides to resign. The impression is that the resignation at this moment would inevitably mean, despite great chances for the winning of Dragan Djilas and taking over the party, new conflicts with some deputy presidents, the war of functions and maybe some separations. That is why it should not be excluded the possibility that Tadić arranges with one of the deputy presidents „peaceful transition „ that would last for couple of years. That would be responsible movement but only if that transition is arranged with Djilas. Surely, it does not mean that Tadić would, if he becomes the Prime Minister, become a political victim. He would start playing one dangerous game in which he simply – has to win! If his government would be successful, if it would be efficient and productive, if it would attract foreign investments, decrease unemployment and corruption and enable new working places –Tadić has got a chance to politically survive in the Democratic Party and strengthen his positions. The cynical ones would say that it is exactly what Tadić was promising in his electoral campaign so that he probably knows to fulfill all of his promises. In any case, if he becomes the Prime Minister, Tadić plays dangerous and uncertain game „all or nothing „.

Either he is going to be a successful Prime Minister and thus survive the crisis and stay firmly leader of his party or he is going to be unsuccessful Prime Minister who is about to be blamed for all bad things happening in the country. Tadić should not have any dilemmas that if he would be unsuccessful his party and his deputy presidents would put on him all responsibility for bad results , the same way as he did with former Prime Minister and the leader of the Democratic Party Zoran Živković when he was taking over the party in 2004. It is a cruel rule of the politics.

The additional Tadić's problem is time. He simply has to make the decision very quickly, in the following days. Every day which Democratic Party loses without the name of the candidate for the Prime Minister and without the negotiations about the new government leads this party towards the opposition. Being in opposition after good electoral results is worst that can happen to the Democratic Party at this moment. According to some calculations, Democratic Party could independently govern only in provincial government in the north province Vojvodina, and only in few towns in Serbia. That would be self-isolation of the party , the loss of several thousand of working places led for years by the representatives of the Democratic Party and would probably cause the rebellion in the party itself meaning that Tadić would hardly managed to stay the President of the Party. If the Democratic Party would do so (there were even such suggestions right after the triumph of Nikolić) it would be a shot right in the middle of a head.

Right after Nikolić's triumph there were rumors in media that the European Union and the USA want Serbia to be under the rule of great coalition constituted out of the two biggest parties, Serbian Progressive Party and Democratic Party which would be strengthened by the Socialists Party of Serbia. This coalition is the least possible out of few reasons. First, that would mean long-term suicide of the Democratic Party because then this party which would have the place of Prime Minister would take over the responsibility for all bad things that happened since it would have had the Prime Minister while the progressives having the President would be granted for all nice and good things. The second, voters of the Democratic Party would very hard accept the coalition with the party that is by its programme completely different and the top of the party would thus send the message to them that only government is important.

And the third, if the USA and the European Union have got such ideas about the great coalition, they want it just because of one reason – because they are convinced that such a coalition can admitt Kosovo's independence because it has two third majority in the parliament, that is necessary for the change of the Constitution of Serbia that defines Kosovo as „ the constitutional part of Serbia.“

And the last, if we exclude Kosovo, this coalition would have sense only if our two strongest parties could make a deal about the structural reforms that are necessary to maintain in the society in order that Serbia avoids Greek scenario it is heading to.

The third party according to the strength in the parliament , the Socialists Party of Serbia (SPS), of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Police Ivica Dačić , was considered as the winner of the general elections held on the sixth of May.

The reason for that is the fact that the Socialists Party of Serbia won almost double more votes than at the elections in 2008. as well as that without this coalition it is not possible to constitute the Government . Exceptionally, if the two strongest parties make an agreement which is the least likely to happen. For Dačić's political future would be the best that on the presidential elections won Boris Tadić. The reason is simple – if Tadić had won new presidential mandate, he could not candidate again for the position of president at the elections in 2017. According to the agreement between the two electoral rounds, between the democrates and the socialists , in that case Dačić would be the Prime Minister or in the worst scenario the Deputy Prime Minister. The next four years in such a government would be Dačić's. He would be the most exposed member of the Government, he would promote himself and he would use his position for gaining more political points. For Dačić's political future very important would be the fact that Serbian Progressive Party would face certain problems because these two parties have got similar electorate. That is exactly why disappointed voters of Serbian Progressive Party would be potential Dačić's voters. If we add to that the fact Tomislav Nikolić would have left politics if he had lost the presidential elections, Dačić would have been the main favourite at the presidential elections in 2017.

The triumph of Nikolić changes Dačić's position. Now he is going to struggle with the Serban Progressive Party which is going to enlarge, for every voter. The difficult circumstance for Dačić is certainly going to be the fact that he is going to be the part of the Government and Serbian Progressive Party will not. It means that the part of dissatisfaction of the citizens is going to be pointed at the Socialists Party of Serbia. So, instead of easy taking over of the progressives' disappointed voters that was supposed to lose rating after Nikolić's defeat – now the Socialists are going to defend their voters from strong progressives and to struggle for every vote. Thus, Dačić must not make any mistakes when choosing the department in new government. While choosing the department he has to take care which department is going to give him most votes at the next elections , meaning through which he can best promote politics of the Socialists Party of Serbia. In short, Dačić starts his electoral campaign for the next parliamentary elections these days by choosing the right Ministry.

It is not suitable for Dačić that the Prime Minister from the Democratic Party become Tadić or Djilas. Simply , the two of them would be present in media that it becomes a question how much Dačić could manage to promote his work in public. That is why for the president of Socialists Party of Serbia would be suitable „weaker“ Prime Minister from the Democratic Party , such as Mirko Cvetković in whose government he was best marked minister. So, Dačić is not satisfied with strong Prime Minister from the Democratic Party but he is satisfied with the coalition with this party. His party has strategically chosen to cooperate with the Democratic Party yet in 2008 and serious political organistions do not change their strategic partners every few years.

Besides, not existing of the coalition with the Democratic Party could possibly bring to the riot of the representatives of this party because for four years of mutual government with the democrates they formed friendly and business relations. Finally, Socialists Party of Serbia and Democratic Party are the parties of left-wing orientation and Dačić constantly stresses that to him is not important the government but its programme.



In the whole story concerning the government the important part could play two smaller parties of pro-european orientation – the Liberal-Democratic Party of Čedomir Jovanović and the United Regions of Serbia of Mladjan Dinkić. If Socialists Party of Serbia and Democratic Party decide to constitute the Government , they are going to need the third partner . Is it going to be one of these two smaller parties or maybe both of them or in the government will enter „ parts „ of these parties, the time will tell. The interest of the Democratic Party is surely going to be as least parties as possible in the opposition concerning the parties of pro-european orientation because they pretend to have the same voters.

The following days are going to be of key importance for the future of the Democratic Party as well as for the future of the whole Serbia. All options are possible and at this moment no one can tell for sure what is going to happen. Every solution has got its pros and cons. In any case, Serbia is eager for quick solution no matter what it is going to be. Those who do not believe in it should look at the currency exchange every morning and see how the national currency dinar daily loses its value.