



THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL

Early presidential elections, that Boris Tadić was not sure for a long time whether to schedule it as early elections or not, have been eagerly waited by the all politicians. It is obvious that all political parties in Serbia have seriously learned the pre-electional campaign of the leading Democratic Party (DS), which has been since half of March strictly ' presidential ' due to the appearance only of the President of the Party and of Serbia Boris Tadic. It was a clear signal to other political leaders that the early presidential elections are going to be held. That is exactly why, only a few days after scheduling of the presidential elections, besides the main Tadic's opponent, the leader of the Serbian Progressive Party Tomislav Nikolić, almost all leaders of the parliamentary political parties have applied candidacies for the place of the President.

For the President of Serbia twelve candidates have announced the candidacy. Apart from the actual president Tadić and the leader of the opposition Nikolić, among them are leaders of parliamentary parties such as the president of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) Ivica Dačić, the president of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Čedomir Jovanović, president of Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) Vojislav Koštunica, and the actual Minister of health Zoran Stanković who was candidated by the United Regions of Serbia (URS). Apart from them, for the President there are two candidates representatives of ethnical minorities – the Hungarians and the Bosnians. The leader of the Minority Party of the ethnical Hungarians – Ištvan Paštor as well as the controversial Muslims religious leader, Muamer Zukorlić. Among other four candidates there are wife of the of the leader of Serbian Radical Party (SRS) Vojislav Šešelj, who is in the Tribunal of the Hague accused of war crimes, Jadranka Šešelj, as well as three, to the wider public almost unknown, pretendants to the place of the first man in Serbia.

Someone who does not know well the political situation in Serbia could be surprised by the fact that all political leaders are struggling for the place of the President, despite the fact that this is the country according to the Constitution parliamentary democracy with the formally quite powerful role of the Parliament and the Government and almost protocolar role of the President of the Republic. The President of the Republic, according to the Constitution of Serbia, represents the state inside the country and abroad, suggests to the National Assembly the candidate for the Prime Minister, after he has listened to the opinion of the electoral lists, has got the right to put a veto on the elected law and to send it back on the review, but if the law has been elected the second time he is in obligation to sign it. The President of Serbia by the Act nominates and recalls the ambassadors according to the suggestion of the Government, has got the right to dismiss the National Assembly and to announce the elections for the representatives of the people, to announce the state of emergency, he is the commander of chief of the Serbian Army and brings the amnesty and medals. In parliamentary democracies it is common that the President with such authorities is chosen in the Parliament with qualified majority. The direct choice of the President at the general elections has been reserved for the countries with the presidential democracy like France or Russia. Still, in Serbia, the President of the republic is chosen directly, on general elections, which brings him strong democratic legitimacy and much greater role in the society than he receives according to the constitutional authorities.



There are more reasons for such a status of the President of the Republic in Serbia, but the most important is the tradition of the direct choice of the president which has existed since the renewal of the multiparty system in the year 1990. During the nineties of the last century, the country was surely led by the former leader of the Socialists Slobodan Milošević. Concerning the strength of his personality, and the fact that he was governing the leading political party he had a strong role in the Serbian society despite formally small constitutional authorities. At that time being the president, Milošević simply needed the direct choice because on that way he was getting the democratic legitimacy which was giving him the right to lead the country independent of the real authorities. At that time, which was characterized by the decay of the former Yugoslavia, the civil war and fiery political struggles for the democracy in Serbia was created the stereotype of strong and politically dominant president who leads the country independently of real authorities. It is exactly why the defeat of the contemporary president Milošević at the early elections in the year 2000. denoted the end of his government, as well as his descent from the political scene despite the fact that on that same elections his party, the Socialist Party of Serbia, won the majority to constitute the government with the same coalitional partners ?! In the next few years, until 2003. and the murder of the Prime Minister of Serbia Zoran Djindjić, the role of contemporary President of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica was very strong because he was struggling on the political scene with the late Prime Minister for the predominance. Not long after that, Koštunica's party formed the government but at the presidential elections for the president was chosen a new leader of the democrats Boris Tadić. Then it came four-year cohabitation of the president and the government and then Tadić's democrats won the elections in the year 2008. and won the executive government as well. Tadić remained the President of the Republic but also the president of the governing Democratic Party which promoted him in the key bearer of the political and state decisions in the country in the last four years. In the more recent period, the opportunity for the tradition to be stopped emerged in the year 2007. when the new Constitution of the Republic of Serbia was brought. However, that Constitution was brought in the terms of political compromise of the three, at that time, leading political parties, so as that the direct choice of the president was not abolished and that function has still remained particularly important. It is exactly the reason why almost all leaders of the political parties today announced candidacies for the President of the Republic with small constitutional authorities and not for the Prime Minister who, according to the Constitution, operatively leads the country.

So, in Serbia it is still dominant for several decades now actual tradition according to which the President of the Republic is the central political figure. The consequence of such a practice is that in Serbia at the position of the President of the Republic are, mostly, always the presidents of the governing political parties. Besides, since the renewal of the multiparty system in Serbia all the Presidents of the Republic who at the moment of choice were the presidents of the political parties remained at the party's position after the election for the President. Thus, the leader of the governing political party must have great influence in the society no matter which function in the country he deals with.

Apart from this direct , there is one more , very practical reason, why almost all the political leaders candidate for the President of Serbia. Namely, the scheduling of the presidential elections in Serbia is not only going to disturb the current relation of political strengths , but is going to completely change the flow of the electoral campaign for local, provincial and parliamentary authorities which were scheduled a few weeks before the presidential elections. The importance of the role of the president in Serbian society is going to attract the attention of media and public and in its shadow are going to stay the elections for other institutional authorities. It means that the presidential candidates are going to ' lead' the campaigns of their parties for other levels too. That is the reason why it is important to the parties that presidential candidates are the strongest people they have , i.e. their leaders.

Because if it is the opposite, if the party does not have strong presidential candidate , it can happen that it records weaker electoral result than it is its rating in the electorate. That is why most of the parties' leaders in Serbia do not candidate at these Presidential elections because they believe they are going to win but in the first place to help their parties record better electoral result. It is not the case only with the two strongest candidates , the former president Boris Tadić and the oppositional leader Tomislav Nikolić. The two of them are really the only two with the chance to win the presidential elections on the 20th of May.

The early presidential elections are scheduled because the former president of the Republic and the leader of the governing democrates Boris Tadić resigned. His resignation Tadić explained as a wish to reduce the electoral expences by scheduling the presidential elections together with local and parliamentary elections. His formal explanation sounds logical because the regular presidential elections would be held at the beginning of the year 2013. but still the basic reason for scheduling the early presidential elections is political. Simply , Tadić as the leader of the governing Democratic Party wanted , by holding the presidential elections at the same time with local, provincial and parliamentary elections ,to help his party win better electoral result on all levels and thus increase its chances of getting another mandate of authority untill 2016. Tadić is aware that on the presidential elections , where he is the main candidate, the public is going to devide on his followers and those who support the oppositional leader Nikolić. In that scenario, it is clear that both Tadić and Nikolić will attract the votes of those voters who would not vote for these two parties if there were not for presidential elections. The leader of the democrates counts on the fact that most voters in Serbia do not make any difference between the voting for the president and voting for other levels of authority so that his party is going to attract more votes on all polls due to his help. Besides, in order to beat the progressives on these elections, the democrates desperately need that the voters understand the upcoming elections as the struggle between good and evil, between progress and setting back, to be or not to be for the country. And for such an event progress, it is ideal stage where there are two candidates „ one to one“. In such a scenario, the democrates are winning again because they motivate their , quite sleepy and disappointed electorate to come to the elections out of fear of progressives ' winning. The problem with this tactic is that part of the other parties' followers that the Democratic Party is counting after the elections to form the government with, will vote for Tadić and thus possibly unable those parties to cross the census.

Then, the Democratic Party which will win more votes will not be in a position to find a party to form a coalition with? So, the tactic of Tadić is excellent – provided to win the elections and not to push potential partners into a deep defeat.

Tadić's main opponent, the leader of the opposition Tomislav Nikolić, wanted to candidate for the Prime Minister on the upcoming elections in Serbia. The reason for that wish is the fact that Tadić is the strongest person in the governing Democratic Party so if the upcoming elections are observed from the place of the president, it is hardly possible that the Democratic Party would have the opponent that could win Nikolić. Nikolić and his progressives counted on the fact that the Democratic Party, because of its own problems, can not announce the name of the candidate for the Prime Minister in advance. The additional reason for such a calculation is the fact that Tadić's deputy, popular mayor of Belgrade Dragan Djilas decided to candidate again for the first man of Serbia's capital. However, the scheduling of the presidential elections forced Nikolić to candidate for the President. It is the game in which he was beaten twice (in 2004. and in 2008.) by Tadić.

Still, however these presidential elections distracted the plans of Nikolić, they will bring him special benefit – they will bring more votes to the list of the progressives than they would have at voting without presidential elections. Similar to the situation with the potential coalition partners of the democrats, the parties that the progressives are counting on will have in new key of the situation less votes which would also, in case that these parties do not cross the census, reduce already low capacity of Nikolić's party. Still, Nikolić's success on these elections directly depend on the fact whether Nikolić is going to manage to avoid the scenario in which Serbia is choosing between good and evil, as well as on the fact whether he is going to be able to prove to his voters that he and his party are capable of managing the state, and that they would not radically change the way country is already moving, meaning that they would not enter the country into conflicts with the neighbours and the world.

The other leaders of parliamentary parties (Dačić from SPS, Jovanović from LDP, Koštunica DSS) became the candidates to save their parties from the scenario in which the part of their voters will give their votes to Tadić and Nikolić and it means to the Democratic Party or to the Serbian Progressive Party at local, provincial and parliamentary elections. Their hope lies in the expectation that they are as political leaders going to have higher ratings than their parties, and in the fact that they became president candidates as „the most recognizable representatives of their parties„ which will help them keep their voters. It seems that the leader of the socialists Dačić is in the best position because he is using to the maximum the situation that he was the best marked minister in the government. Dačić is trying to be the third at the presidential elections, because that place guarantees him to at least formally determine the winner at the second round of the presidential elections. And the one who wins the presidential elections is going to be ready to benevolently share the government with the one who has enabled him to win. It is Dačić's calculation in which, in such key of the events, the place of Prime Minister is not far from him.

It seems that out of all parliamentary parties the biggest mistake made the leader of the United Regions of Serbia Mladjan Dinkić who is the only leader of relevant parliamentary political party in Serbia who did not candidate at the presidential elections. It seems that Dinkić, aware of the fact that he is not personally much popular, did not want to let himself be the fifth or sixth at the presidential elections. Dinkić candidate for the president the current Minister of Health Zoran Stanković. Stanković has got better image in wider public than Dinkić but the question is how much the voters of URS recognize him as their candidate. That is why to this party can happen to finish with less votes than the polls predict. The reason more is also the fact that in the television campaign of this party almost particularly appears Dinkić who is not the presidential candidate?! Only few videos with the right candidate Stanković are not going to be enough for the voters of this party to identify with the person they have not learned to be their leader.

From other candidates, the most interesting is the candidacy of Jadranka Šešelj, the wife of Vojislav Šešelj who is accused of war crimes at the Hague Tribunal. The candidacy of a woman who has never been in politics, nor has ever had a public appearance, who is not quite a good speaker tells only about one purpose – to surname Šešelj appear on the ballot. The radicals count on the fact that they will this way manage to save their electorate especially if we know that most of their followers as their second choice state the progressive Tomislav Nikolić. It means that they would in the case of „inadequate offer „ of their party could vote for the candidate that is not radical. Surely it scares the radicals but also the governing democrats that are quite interested for good result of ultranationalistic Serbian Radical Party (SRS) whose leader is Šešelj as much as possible.

The calculation of the democrats is simple. Concerning that the strongest oppositional party SNS headed by its leader Tomislav Nikolić was founded by the separation of Serbian Radical Party, the democrats expect that these two parties can not create a coalition. That is why more votes for the radicals means less votes for the progressives. Is the surprising move of the radicals with the candidacy of Jadranka Šešelj going to bring them better success or push it under the census is hard to predict at this moment. In any case, we are talking about the risky move. The radicals have been without its leader Šešelj for nine years now, since he is in the Hague and during that time have been promoted in public several party's leaders even after the leaving of Nikolić who has formed his own party. These leaders do not have enough strength as their leader Vojislav Šešelj but they are known among their voters. To give up them in order to put on the list person who has only had a surname Šešelj is the way into the unknown. Even if that candidate gets bigger media promotion by the governing party.

The candidacies of the representatives of minor parties are aimed to save their own electorates from the governing democrats. It is known the fact that the members of national minorities in Serbia up till now at presidential elections have voted for the former president Tadić. That would be the case this time too. It is the reason why the candidate is the leader of the Ethnical Hungarians Party Istvan Paštor because the votes of the Hungarians for Tadić could lead to the worse electoral result of the party especially on local and provincial levels. (The Hungarians almost all live in the Autonomy Province of Vojvodina and in May is already voting for the parliament of the province.)



The candidacy of Sandzak's mufti Zukorlić for the president of Serbia is much complex. This controversial religious leader of the Muslims who live in Serbia is always at the centre of attention because of his inadequate and very often extreme announcements. Mufti is surely aware of the fact that he will not be elected the president of Serbia but anyway he is not interested in the votes of Christians which make great majority of voters in Serbia. For him much more important is struggle inside the Muslims electorate in Serbia who is divided in several parties one of which is the one informally led by Zukorlić. Beside this party in Sandzak (area in the southwest of Serbia where Muslims are majority) there are two more parties led by the moderate and pro-European politician Rasim Ljajić (who was the Minister in Serbian government for several times and whose party is on the list of the coalition headed by the governing Democratic Party) and former untouchable leader of Sandzak's Muslims Sulejman Ugjanin. Mufti wants with his candidacy in the same way as Tadić and Nikolić do, to tie to his party the votes of the Bosnians, beat his competition and place himself as the only and untouchable leader of the Muslims in Serbia. The candidacies of Paštor and Zukorlić will influence worse electoral result of Boris Tadić in the first round of presidential elections because their voters traditionally vote for the candidate of the Democratic Party at the presidential elections. And who are minorities going to vote in the second round for is going to depend a lot on result in the first round.

Time for the applying of candidacies for the president of Serbia ran out and now there is going to be merciless struggle for every vote and in that struggle all means are going to be used. The deposit is enormous –four- year government from the smallest municipality to the place of the President of the Republic.