

WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE TO BE IN MY PLACE?

Are the citizens of Serbia, after a year of elections, going to come out to polls again or the Government is going to be reconstructed for months, this is the question that has been asked for months. The facts tell that the Government of Ivica Dačić is stable since it has got the majority in the Parliament of around 140 out of 250 members of Parliament, according to the latest public researches it enjoys complete support of 25 per cent and partial support of almost 40 per cent of the citizens, and during almost nine months of its work there were no greater public misunderstandings among parties that consist the Government. Still, according to the same research, more than 50 per cent of voters believe that there are going to be held early parliamentary elections by the end of the year. Obviously the situation in which the head of the Government is the leader from smaller party in the leading coalition, while at the same time the bigger party records high increase of its rating, has been accepted with one part of the public as unsustainable and as certain reason for the early elections. Is it the thing that is really going to happen, no one in Serbia can give the right answer at the moment to that question.

Early elections would be most suitable for the strongest political party in the country, Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) led by the first Deputy Prime Minister of the Serbian Government and the politician with the highest rating in Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. This party, founded only a bit more than four years ago, managed to win 24 per cent of votes at the parliamentary elections in May 2012, and its president Tomislav Nikolić in the second round of early presidential elections won against then actual president Boris Tadić. In only a few months Serbian Progressive Party constituted the Government in which it does not have a Prime Minister but has got most of the Ministers, as well as the government in almost all local self-governments in Serbia except for the Capital of Serbia Belgrade, Autonomy Province of Vojvodina and ten more smaller towns and municipalities. Since then the rating of the party is in constant high increase mostly due to the work of its new leader Vučić who took over the party when Nikolić was chosen to be the President of the Republic. According to the researches that have been announced, the support to the Serbian Progressive Party moves between 35 and 43 per cent of the voters that made the decision to come out to the next elections and the rating of its leader Aleksandar Vučić is stronger than the support this party enjoys. Thus such high rating of the party is exactly the main reason why public believes that Serbian Progressive Party is going to make a decision to schedule early elections. If it would happen, there would not be any uncertainty and Serbian Progressive Party would dominantly win the elections. That would enable the progressives (public name for Serbian Progressive Party) to constitute the Government themselves with the help of a certain smaller party in which their leader would be the Prime Minister and they would provide their political programme in the following four years.

In that Government there would probably not be any place for current coalitional partners Socialists Party of Serbia (SPS) of actual Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, and United Regions of Serbia (URS) of actual Deputy Prime Minister of the Government being in charge of Economy Mladjan Dinkić, or at least for one of these two parties.

It is interesting that not even current opposition today in Serbia has any doubts about the convincing winning of Serbian Progressive Party at the early elections but still demands early elections? The reason lies in the fact that even the greatest oppositional party, Democratic Party, accepted the fact that the next elections would be a struggle for the second and the third place, meaning the candidacy for some minor coalitional partner of the progressives in the future Government. Everyone from actual coalitional partners, the socialists (popular name for Socialists Party of Serbia) and Dinkić's party , to the oppositional democrates (popular name for the Democratic Party) would take part in that contest

It gives relaxed position to the progressives that after such elections choose minor partner which would not share the government with them but provide the politics of Serbian Progressive Party. Such progress of the event is so promising that there is hardly any political party that would miss a chance to capitalize its popularity this way. Still, the progressives have not yet made a decision to go to early elections because for a different decision there are also serious arguments.

As one of the arguments for scheduling early elections , mostly in the opposition, is quoted the thesis that the economic situation in the country is very difficult and that „ Serbia is about to face hot autumn“ so that the progressives would, by scheduling early elections, secure for themselves new mandate before the „economic collapse“. However, things are not set that way. The progressives have not achieved their high rating they have got today at the elections because in May last year they had „only“ two per cent higher support than leading democrates at that time. It used to happen in the past that some other politicians had high rating ,like former presidents Vojislav Koštunica and Boris Tadić that they would achieve at the elections where they would triumphantly win. It turned out, however, that by their later activities as the governing ones, they did not justify that support and it would soon disappear. Let us not forget that Koštunica and Tadić had strong opposition that also contributed to the fall of their popularity. The progressives' popularity was created differently, after the elections, as a consequence of their leader Vučić's work in the Government. It is why that support is stronger and is going to exist as long as citizens are convinced that no one can do that work better in their interest. Besides, Serbian Progressive Party simply does not have the opposition which can in a long term period endanger its rating. To stop having trust in Serbian Progressive Party , citizens must recognize the alternative in some other political party. There is no such an alternative today and thus Serbian Progressive Party can feel carefree. Concerning the arguments that Serbia is going to experience „ hot economic autumn“, it has been mentioned in Belgrade every spring for years and it would always turn out to be precarious. Serbia is a country without strong labour unions because it does not have the tradition of organizing the workers, and citizens are not familiar with protests not even about most important questions of their existence. If we add to that the fact that the expectations of citizens in the time of global economic crisis are lower than those in „ normal“ times , it is clear that there is not going to be any hot autumn this year , nor any other year at all.

Besides, it is a big question whom the citizens consider to be the guilty one for bad standard? It may sound odd but most Serbian citizens consider the oppositional Democratic Party to be the guilty one for economic troubles and not the leading Serbian Progressive Party. To that contributes large number of economic affairs from the period of the governing of Democratic Party that have been revealed daily and for which the responsible one is the party itself and its former leader Tadić.

Simply, for the progressives is enough to show what they took over in the society and economy as well as to assure the voters that they are doing their best to remedy the situation and they do not need to worry that bad economic situation is going to endanger their rating.

There are several more reasons why the progressives have not decided yet whether to schedule the early elections. Serbian Progressive Party can get today the position of Prime Minister even without the elections. Current disposition of political power in the Parliament, additionally changed by the problems in the Democratic Party, enables the progressives to take over the place of the Prime Minister or change at least one partner in the Government any time they want. The Government is currently supported by 141 member of the Parliament out of 250 Members of the Parliament, but real opposition has got only 62 Members of the Parliament. There remain 47 Members from various parties and individual Members from Democratic Party of Serbia to the parliamentary group Together for Serbia which separated from the Democratic Party. Most of them are potential support to the Serbian Progressive Party so this party in the Parliament can change the Prime Minister and the constitution of the Government any time it wants. Besides, in today's Government of Serbia, in which they do not have the position of the Prime Minister, the progressives do not have any problems to impose their own politics. That position is guaranteed by the political strength and the rating of their leader. Then, the leader of the progressives has started as the Deputy Prime Minister many processes, from those in the inner politics to the negotiations concerning Kosovo, European integrations, all to the improving the relations in the first place with Germany as the most important European country. All these processes are going to be stopped if the new elections are about to be scheduled. And not only the processes but the whole country, state administration, economy and foreign investments. Vučić is quite aware of that situation, as well as of the question if the country is capable of holding another six months of pause that would bring new elections. And finally, the result of new elections would not only be just a formalisation of the leading position of the progressives in the society but it would bring them another additional responsibility in the economy for which Mladjan Dinkić is currently responsible. The last, but not the least important is the attitude of the international community concerning the early elections. As things stand for now, not any of these great power countries supports the elections because the general opinion in the world is that Serbia after a long time elected responsible Government which is capable of keeping up its word, which honestly wishes to finally solve the problem of Kosovo, which is determined to reform the society and maintain reforms, and which has got great respect and support in nation to fulfill such reforms. In the world, no matter if it looks like a formality, every elections are potential risk which is considered now as unnecessary when we talk about Serbia.

So, the decision of the progressives about the early elections is not easy and simple as it looks like at first sight and depends on many factors out of which is least important the one whether Serbia is going to start negotiations on joining the European Union this year or not. At this moment is more likely that the strongest party is going to choose the reconstruction of the current Government than to vote again. Still, (not) scheduling the early elections is the political question so that the reasons for the decision of the progressives are going to be political. It is clear that the Serbian Progressive Party is going to be in Dačić's cabinet as long as it can carry out its political programme which has brought not only to the progressives but to the Government itself high rating, or until other parties of the coalition or individuals do not become a burden for the Government so that it can not keep the rating it has got at the moment.

Finally, even if they decide to schedule early elections , progressives are fully aware that they have to give to the citizens a serious reason why they are going to the elections again only after a year. And that reason has to be political and motivated by the interests of the country. That is why Serbia is at this moment closer to the reconstruction of the Government by which the leading coalition would show that it is responsible and ready to change those Ministers who do not do their job.

The greatest oppositional party, the Democratic Party, whose leader is the Mayor of Belgrade, Dragan Djilas, is the greatest advocate of the early elections. The representatives of this party are convinced that a new voting is going to be held by the end of the year as well as that it is going to mark their return to the government, at least as a younger partner of the progressives. Still, the question in which percentage would the elections be suitable for this party? The rating of the party is lower than in the time when the Democratic Party was the governing party, and it is the smallest problem this party is facing at the moment. Much greater problem are the separations inside the party which emerged as a consequence of the agreement between the former leader Tadić and current president Djilas. By this agreement was announced the change of the leader, but the former president kept a strong influence in the party bodies which in a great extent slows making the decisions and makes an impression in public that the party has got two leaders. The problem for the Democratic Party is forming of a new political party „ Together for Serbia“ which is led by a former deputy president of the Democratic Party Dušan Petrović as well as the conflict with a popular former Minister of the Foreign Affairs , now the President of the General Assembly of United Nations Vuk Jeremić.

Dušan Petrović is not a strong, charismatic political leader but he is a person who was in the Democratic Party all from the member, a president of municipal board, representative in the Parliament, Vice President of the party to the Deputy President of the party.

Since 2004. , when for the President was elected Boris Tadić, only Petrović was active in organisation of the Democratic Party. By doing that job, he became familiar with every municipal board of the party, almost all local leaders and he had the opportunity to establish personal contacts with many of them, or to do them favours. There lies his strenght and that is exactly why he is dangerous for the current Democratic Party.

He is not going to take to his party more members than there are going to stay in the Democratic Party, nor he is ever going to have higher rating than the current leader of the Democratic Party Djilas, but he is going to take with him local leaders, many people who wider public is not even familiar with but whose work was for the decades the base of the Democratic Party in smaller places in Serbia, more precisely, he is going to take a significant part of the local party structure. In that attention he is helped unconsciously by the current representatives of the party which have only in one day dismissed more tenths of local boards thus pushing many local municipal leader in the hands of Petrović. This kind of ending is going to make harm to the, maybe by far, the greatest advantage of the Democratic Party over other parties – the organisation. The question is whether the new management of the party is going to be able to replace people who had been for the decades symbols of the party in small places by some new people who are supposed to be more qualified personally, as well as through their political work. New leader of the party Djilas did not pass through all party structures so that so far he has not shown the awareness of the danger of losing a part of party organisation.

Great parties are not only great because of their current rating but because of strong organisation, hundreds of thousands of members, and the fact that in every village they have got their people who pass political messages, talk to the other citizens and influence the attitudes of voters. It is the axiom of politics which encounters for much more developed democracies than Serbian. If the party does not have an organisation, it can not be restored by the media campaign. Or to say it more precisely – small parties can only lead a campaign over the media or social networks, because for the small result sometimes it is all what is necessary, but great result can not be made without a strong organisation. It can happen to the Democratic Party at the elections to make lower result than its rating because probably it is not going to make each of its voters come out the elections. That is why the „unpopular“ Petrović can make more harm to the Democratic Party than „popular“ Jeremić. When we speak about Jeremić, it can be noticed that he can not manage best when he is in the position where he needs to fight on his own for his place in the politics, meaning when he has not got a strong party and a menthor as a back up (read the Democratic Party and Tadić). He does not have any experience or strength to form his own party so that his only chance is to join some other party as soon as possible, no matter if that party is the one of Dušan Petrović or any other of existing ones. Today there are many offers on his table but if he is about to hesitate it can happen to him that no one remembers him any more when he is back from New York in September, after the end of his mandate in the United Nations. Then it would only be left for him to ,as former president of Serbia Boris Tadić, seek for some international engagement.

The greatest loser of potential elections could be the Socialists Party of Serbia. It could be a paradox, but this party could win more votes at the early elections than it won in May 2012., and not to be a part of the governing ones. Simply, after new elections it is almost impossible the scenario as in May last year, when two greatest parties were almost equal so that the third party was in a position to decide about the government which enabled it even to get a position of Prime Minister. So, as it is certain a convincing winning of the Serbian Progressive Party at the elections, it is also certain that Seocialists Party of Serbia would not have the Prime Minister any more, even if it again becomes a part of the Government.

That key of the situation would certainly open the question of the leadership in the party. Dačić's arguments are strong international support which is the consequence of his successful negotiations about Kosovo as well as the fact Socialists Party of Serbia has not since its defeat in the year 2000. had stronger positions in administration. Despite the affairs which were revealed in public, his rating has not been cut off. Still, he has to bear in his mind that he owes his rating to the fact that his government does not have the opposition which endangers it and as a consequence one part of the citizens do not have the alternative which party to vote for, as well as the fact that part of his rating he owes to Vučić.

The first year of his mandate was marked by Kosovo, but now that problem is not going to be that dominant because during April it is going to be ended either by the historical agreement or is going to become a frozen conflict. Thus it is going to be necessary to Dačić to find other topics to tie to himself and to his party. His political future depends on how successful he is going to be in that situation.

When we take into consideration other parties, at the possible early elections they could not count on much greater electoral result than the last year. This situation is particularly confusing when we talk about the right wing Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) of former President and a Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, and a left wing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of former Deputy Prime Minister in the Government Čedomir Jovanović. Despite the fact that the development of the political events went in favour of these parties they simply did not record a significant increase of their rating.

It is interesting that Koštunica's party simply did not use the fact that most of the public have got the impression that this party was right when it talked about Kosovo, that less than 50 per cent of citizens support joining of Serbia to the European Union which is the politics of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) as well as the fact that the country accepted the politics of this party concerning the military neutrality. One of the reasons why the rating of Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) does not increase lies in a fact that one part of its voters support now the leading Serbian Progressive Party. However, when party is not capable of capitalizing the events that are happening in its favour, then appears the question of its leadership. For the Democratic Party of Serbia and its leader Vojislav Koštunica the next elections are of crucial importance. If they do not success to become a part of the government as a party, hard days are about to come for the party, maybe even the getting off the political scene. In order to succeed in that, Koštunica's democrates must for a start find some other topics apart from Kosovo.

The liberals (popular name for the Liberal Democratic Party) of Čedomir Jovanović have got a great opportunity to use the conflicts in the Democratic Party and gain new followers. This party, formed out of Democratic Party, after the expelling of its leader Jovanović back in 2004., in the recent period has become younger partner to the democrates. It was obvious to expect that one part of dissatisfied voters of the Democratic Party would decide to join the Liberal Democratic Party and that could be the reason why the leader of the democrates Djilas almost staged the conflict with Liberal Democratic Party in a way that he took over this party's only representative in the Parliament of the Autonomy Province of Vojvodina.

It is obvious that Djilas considers liberals not to be his partners but the competition, which can overtake a part of his party's voters so he wanted this way to send a message to his disappointed voters that the „Liberal Democratic Party is not a friendly party.“ This conflict may have more permanent consequences on the left wing than it may seem at first sight. At the next elections it is going to prevent the Democratic Party of creating a wide front on the left wing because without the Liberal Democratic Party it is not going to be possible. At the same time, Liberal Democratic Party is going to be forced to search for new allies and the candidate may be exactly Petrović with his party „ Together for Serbia „ as well as the regional Vojvodina's party „ The League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina“ (LDSV) with its President Nenad Čanak which now has got five representatives in the Parliament and which is also, because of the transfer of the Deputy President of the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LDSV) in the Democratic Party (DS), in bad relations with the democrates. This kind of coalition, which could join some other regional parties too, could offer a belief to disappointed voters of the Democratic Party that by voting for this coalition they support someone who is certainly entering the Parliament and is not going to be a part of the Government.

This way the Liberal Democratic Party could solve the greatest problem because of which the voters of the Democratic Party are not joining them, voters are not convinced that the liberals are strong enough to represent their interests and to surely enter the Parliament. In this development of the situation, the coalition around Liberal Democratic Party amplified by Petrović, Čanak and some local leaders could seriously endanger the Democratic Party.

Ahead of Serbia are very hard decisions concerning Kosovo, European integrations, internal social and economic reforms. Could the possible reconstruction of the Government or new elections help in speeding up these processes or in slowing them down , this is the question without an answer. Depending on these answers exactly, lie the solutions of political events in Serbia.