

## A BIG CHANGE: THE 2012 ELECTIONS IN SERBIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE WESTERN BALKANS<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract.* The key results of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections are analysed in the paper. Twelve years after the fall of the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic, radical political change has occurred in Serbia. A new government has been created by two parties from the Milosevic era – the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and the Serbian Progressive Party (SPP), created after the breakup of Sesel's extreme Serbian Radical Party. The third member of the coalition is Mladjan Dinkic's new party, the United Regions of Serbia (the former G17 Plus). It has to be said that both the Socialist Party and the Progressive Party have changed and verbally accepted pro-democratic and pro-European politics. The defeat of Boris Tadic in the presidential elections and his party in the parliamentary elections was caused by the difficult economic situation, the wrong strategy being taken by the Democratic Party (DP) which led to early presidential elections, and the strengthening of the Socialist Party. Further, the Democratic Party adopted the wrong strategy towards the Progressive Party. Firstly, it helped it in its separation from the Serbian Radical Party, although the DP later accused the SPP of bringing Serbia towards war. In the region of the Western Balkans the changes in Serbia have been received with great suspicion. The main reason for this scepticism is the radical past of leaders of the Serbian Progressive Party, coupled with certain statements made by the new President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolic. In contrast, the major Western powers have welcomed the changes in Serbia since they believe the new government will make faster progress as far as the issue of Kosovo is concerned.

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The first real change in government occurred in Serbia 12 years after the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic was replaced. After parliamentary and early presidential elections, a new government was formed by the two parties that constituted the foundation of the previous authoritarian regime: the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), and the Serbian Progressive Party (SPP) which emerged after the split of the extreme right-wing Serbian Radical Party, plus the United Regions of Serbia which is the party of Mladjan Dinkic, the first Governor of the National Bank after the change in 2000. Both the SPS and SPP have changed considerably and today they favour, both programmatically and in words, a pro-democratic and pro-European orientation.

After a decade of being ruled by parties that had been victorious over the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia also experienced the turning point which in all other Central and Eastern European countries happened as early as in the 1990s when the reformed communist parties quickly came back to power<sup>2</sup>. This change came to Serbia considerably later because of the belated transformation of the parties that marked the troubled 1990s.

The coalition gathered around the Serbian Progressive Party (SPP) won, as expected, the majority of votes (24%) in the parliamentary elections held on 6 May 2012. It obtained 73 seats in parliament. The coalition gathered around the Democratic Party (DP) came second, with 22% and 67 seats. The coalition gathered around the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) came third, winning 14.6% and 44 seats. In fourth place was Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DPS) that with 7% of the votes obtained 21 MPs. The "Turnover" coalition led by Cedomir Jovanovic's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) gained 20 MPs with 6.5% of the votes. The United Regions of Serbia (URS) passed the electoral threshold and won 16 seats with 5.5% of the votes. Parties representing national minorities won a total of nine seats. The big surprise was that, for the first time since its establishment, the extreme right-wing Serbian Radical Party (SRP) led by Vojislav Sesel did not pass the threshold and enter parliament.

The early presidential elections were held at the same time as the parliamentary elections. They were won by a moderate right-wing candidate, Toma Nikolic, who defeated the incumbent president Boris Tadic in the second round of the elections with 49.7% against 47% of the votes. In this way Serbian voters decided, after all, to punish the government for the previous four-year mandate. Surprisingly, they did so only in the second round of the presidential elections and not in the parliamentary elections, which would have been much more logical and expected given the difficult economic and social crisis in Serbia.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this, see "Vlast i opozicija u Srbiji" (*Power and Opposition in Serbia*) by Ognjen Pribicevic, Radio B92, 1997.

The presidential election result has triggered major changes in the Serbian political scene. After Boris Tadic's defeat in the presidential election, both of the DP's coalition partners, the SPS and URS, decided to abandon the DP and accept the SPP's offer to form a government with them. Apart from Tadic's defeat, the key reason for this change of mind of the DP's former partners was the generous offer by the SPP of the positions of both the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior to the SPS' chairman, and practically all economic and financial departments to Dinkic.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the key characteristics of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Serbia. At the end, I will try to explain the implications of the changes in Serbia for the region of the Western Balkans.

The defeat of Boris Tadic in the second round of the presidential elections was one of the most important characteristics of the recent elections in Serbia. The surprise over this result is even greater since Tadic had defeated Nikolic in the first round of the presidential elections, gaining 25.33% of the votes compared to Nikolic's 25%. In the previous presidential elections in 2004 and 2008 which were won by Tadic, it was Nikolic who attracted more votes in the first round.

There are several reasons for Nikolic's relatively surprising victory. First, considering that the turnout was very low, about 46%, which is about 12% less than in the first round of the presidential elections and the parliamentary elections held on May 6, it is obvious that, besides the Radicals which announced they would boycott the second round of the presidential elections, not an insignificant number of DP, LDP and URS supporters also abstained from voting for Tadic. Altogether, it seems that a number of disillusioned supporters of the former ruling coalition parties had decided to stay at home and, in doing so, punished the previous four-year government for all the difficulties they had encountered since the start of the great economic crisis. The question remains as to why they decided to do this in the case of Boris Tadic and not the government which, under the Constitution, is far more responsible for the country's economy. It appears that, with such a choice of scapegoat, the voters punished the one they held most responsible for their bad economic and social conditions. Many analysts believe that Boris Tadic himself greatly contributed to this impression for he had practically been deciding on all of the most important issues in the country, and had been openly showing this.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Hardly anybody will appreciate the government of Serbia, Prime Minister Cvetkovic and the ministers individually, if Boris Tadic delivers requests for such and such legal solutions through media, if he evaluates the work of the ministers, announces the reconstruction of the government etc. Who will respect the investigative and judicial organs if the President keeps asking a few tycoons to have mercy and build a bridge across the river Sava, or donate a few bucks to the poor, rather than encourage efficient investigations of the sources of their wealth, disputed privatizations, monopolies etc." Zoran Slavujević,

The second reason for Boris Tadic's defeat relates to the fact that, undoubtedly, a number of the DP's voters stayed at home under the impression that everything was settled anyway, and that Tadic would quite certainly win. This false impression was boosted by the media and numerous polling agencies which in advance proclaimed Boris Tadic the winner of these elections. Accordingly, the overconfidence seen before the second round of the presidential elections backfired on the DP and its candidate.

Third, the DP's overstated negative campaign against Tomislav Nikolic irritated a large number of the voters and influenced them to stay at home and not go to the polls.

Fourth, there is Boris Tadic's decision to himself shorten his term in office by nine months and call early presidential elections, which were held along with the parliamentary elections. One should keep in mind that Serbia's recent political history shows that whoever has called early elections, either parliamentary or presidential, has lost them. This happened to Milosevic in 2000, Prime Minister Zivkovic in 2003, Prime Minister Kostunica in 2007, and now Tadic in 2012. This confirms that voters do not like politicians who, for whatever reason, resign and call early elections.

In addition to Tadic's defeat in the presidential elections, the biggest surprise of the recent elections is clearly the great success of the coalition gathered around the SPS which enjoyed an increase in votes from 7.8% to almost 15%. Hence, the SPS with its small coalition partners, the Party of United Pensioners (PUPS) and the United Serbia (US), more than doubled the number of its votes. How can one explain this large number of votes won by Dacic and his party? In the first place, although a ruling party, for over six months the SPS led its campaign as an opposition party, criticising the policy of the government in which it itself had participated. Dacic particularly criticised the government's social policy, demanding a revision of the "robbery privatisations" of the early 2000s.<sup>4</sup> In that way, the SPS managed to attract a large number of impoverished citizens and the so-called transition losers. When it comes to Kosovo and the EU, Dacic appealed to a number of nationalist-oriented SPP, DPS and SRP voters with his nationalist and populist language. During the election campaign, Dacic said on more than one occasion that Serbia can exist without the EU and that the fairytales about Kosovo should come to an end. He also stated that the only solution for Kosovo was a demarcation, which means nothing other than a division,

*"Dvadeset godina višestranačja u Srbiji, od marketinškog nihilizma i primitivizma do totalnog marketinga..." (Twenty Years of a Multiparty System in Serbia, From Marketing Nihilism and Primitivism to Total Marketing) in the book "Partije i izbori u Srbiji" (Parties and Elections in Serbia) Čigoja, 2011, p. 293.*

<sup>4</sup> For more on this, see Ognjen Pribicevic "Srbija između EU, Kosova i Metohije i predstojećih parlamentarnih izbora" (Serbia between the EU, Kosovo and the Forthcoming Elections) "Srpska politička misao", no. 1. 2012 p. 196.

and that the official policy on both Kosovo and the EU, which he himself had been supporting for four years, meant nothing.

Second, through his demagogic messages, like the one about the IMF having no place in Serbia<sup>5</sup>, Dacic managed to intensify voters' impressions of the SPS as being the only true left-wing party in Serbia, which certainly earned him several votes. Seeking a position as the only true left-wing party, Dacic went a step further by saying how the DP was not a party of the left, and that he personally would regale every member of the DP who was a leftist.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the SPS' good result is a consequence of the fact that the DP had opened a wide space for Dacic in the media close to itself, which he proficiently exploited. Namely, Dacic had a chance to appear almost daily in those media establishments said to be close to the DP, and take advantage of this to criticise both the SPP and the DP, with practically no DP reaction being seen to any of those criticisms.

Fourth, the SPS' great success was certainly advanced by the excellent campaign and Ivica Dacic's skilful leadership. Namely, unlike some other politicians, his messages were very clear, concise and decisive. This helped create a public impression of Dacic as a politician who says what others fail to mention, and a man who cares for his people. He also took good advantage of his position in the government, especially as the Minister of Interior, largely popular among the Serbs.

The second important characteristic of the parliamentary elections is the SPP's failure to capitalise on people's significant discontent with the difficult economic and social situation. Instead of the expected 30 or more percent of the votes, this party won just 24%. The SPP's weak result in the parliamentary elections was surely influenced by the DP's negative campaign, which almost daily reminded voters about the radical past of their leaders Nikolic and Vucic. However, probably the key reason for the SPP's weaker result is that this party did not manage to profile itself as a real alternative to the DP. Instead, the SPP presented itself as a party which is a little bit of everything, both the EU and Russia, General Mladic and Cedomir Jovanovic, the leader of the LDP, and as a party ready to cooperate with both the DPS and the LDP.

In any case, during the campaign the SPP's leaders did not leave an impression of being people who could run the country more efficiently than the leaders of the DP, thus reducing their chances almost exclusively to the voters' discontent and their inclination to punish the ruling party for

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<sup>5</sup> "Ekonomisti ne podržavaju Dačića" (*Economists Do Not Support Dacic*), *Politika*, 30 March 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the changes within the left, see Ognjen Pribicevic "Levica u potrazi za novim identitetom" (*The Left in the Search for a New Identity*) *Politička revija* no. 2. 2011, and Zoran Stojiljković "Socijaldemokratija i političke stranke u Srbiji" (*Social Democracy and Political Parties in Serbia*) in "Ideologija i političke stranke u Srbiji" (*Ideology and Political Parties in Serbia*) *FES; IDN i FPN* 2007, pp. 113–155.

the steep drop in the standard of living.<sup>7</sup> The impression of insubstantiality and unreliability was deepened by various, utterly frivolous promises made by the party's leaders, like the one about bringing EUR 100 billion of investments to Serbia over the next ten years. For the last several years, Serbia has hardly attracted EUR 2 billion in investment per year, and in the conditions of the great economic crisis even that sum seems unachievable.

Third, some important characteristics of the parliamentary elections concern the result of the DP. The DP lost a significant number of votes in the parliamentary elections. In the previous elections, the coalition of the DP and the G17 Plus won 38%, but this time it only attracted 22% of the votes. If one subtracts 5%, which is probably how much the G17 Plus contributed in the previous elections, then a loss of about 10% of the votes is revealed, meaning that the DP lost about one-third of its votes. However, when considering that voters perceived the DP as the only ruling party because both the G17 Plus and the SPS had led their campaigns as an opposition, this is not such a bad result given the huge economic crisis and very poor results of the Serbian government concerning the economy and the standard of living. Yet the DP was encouraged by the excellent result in Belgrade achieved by Dragan Djilas who won 36% of the votes.

The DP failed to achieve several important goals in these elections. First, its candidate lost the presidential elections, which were preceded by the wrong judgment to call early presidential elections.

Second, the party's intention to create a two-party system in Serbia and 'snatch' votes away from the smaller, ideologically and politically close parties like the LDP and the URS was not fulfilled. This was precisely the aim of Tadic and the DP's decision to bring the presidential and parliamentary elections together, in order to shift the voters' focus on the latter to the two leading parties – the DP and the SPP – which in the opinion of the party's leadership would create an opportunity to gain the votes of certain smaller parties with a similar body of voters to the DP, such as the URS and the LDP<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> That is also the opinion of most authors who have analysed the SPP's policy. Thus, for example, Miša Djurković says: "Their attitude is ambivalent on all issues. They clearly want to come to power, but nobody can assume how they would act, and what policy they would pursue". "Programski identiteti desnih partija u Srbiji krajem prve decenije ovog veka" (Programme Identity of Right Wing Parties in Serbia at the End of the First Decade of the 21st Century) in the book "Partije i izbori u Srbiji" (Parties and Elections in Serbia), edited by Slaviša Orlović 2011, p. 208. A similar opinion is held by Slaviša Orlović, who says: "The problem is that the SPP builds its position less on a positive and prospective programme, and more on criticism of the government. Mobilising the citizens' discontent by the low standard of living, national humiliation and the effects of the crisis is an insufficient programme platform, for it is, in the first place, no programme at all" Slaviša Orlović, "Partijski sistem Srbije", (The Party System in Serbia) in the book "Partije i izbori u Srbiji" (Parties and Elections in Serbia), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> "The structure of the DP's voters is closest to the G17 Plus and the LDP. After growing from an expert group into a political party G17 Plus, its election results and rating would go up when the DP's would go down, and vice versa, too. The voters of these two programmatically close parties acted as if they were in

The election results show that the DP's strategic assessment here was also wrong. Both the DP and the SPP won significantly fewer votes than had been expected, and both the URS and the LDP passed the electoral threshold and entered parliament. Not only did Serbian voters not accept the idea to enlarge political groups but, on the contrary, through their votes they made the political scene in Serbia even more intricate and complex. The Parliament of Serbia thus now has 45 parties and groups compared to the previous term when there were 22 of them.

Third, the DP's strategy to discredit the SPP as a party of the past, even as a party that might drag Serbia into war, also turned out to be unsuitable<sup>9</sup>. It was none other than Boris Tadic and the DS who had been crucially instrumental in distancing Toma Nikolic from Sesel's hard-line wing in the SRP, and in forming the new, quite moderate SPP in 2008. Through decisions of the appropriate parliamentary bodies, the DP's MPs enabled the SPP to form a club of MPs out of those who had left the SRP after the split. Accordingly, the SPP became a parliamentary party even though it did not take part in the elections. After splitting from Sesel, Nikolic made significant changes within the new party, with the SPP then accepting EU integration as one of its most important goals, and considerably changed its policy towards Kosovo and Metohija<sup>10</sup>.

These changes in the SPP's policy brought about the first elections in Serbia in the last 15 years that did not have anything 'fateful' and 'decisive' bearing in mind that, regardless of who won, no radical changes were expected in relation to the previous policy in terms of the country's strategic orientation towards the EU and Kosovo.

Despite all of that, the DP decided to conduct a so-called negative campaign and produced several videos that showed what Nikolic had said about the EU, Kosovo and other issues while he was in the SRP, and what he had been saying more recently. President Tadic also spoke about Nikolic as his main opponent, stating that he "is saying today everything contrary to

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*a communicating vessels system, at moments they pulled on one, at another moment on the other side. For example, in 2003 the DP won 12.6 % of the votes, and the G17 Plus 11.5 %. In the following elections in 2007, the DP won 22.7 %, and the G17 Plus 5.8 %. The LDP emerged initially as the fraction within the DP. It maintained a similar voters' structure like the DP, but with the prevalence of younger, medium and highly educated voters" Slaviša Orlović, "Partijski sistem Srbije" (Party System of Serbia) in the book "Partije i izbori u Srbiji" (Parties and Elections in Serbia), Čigoja, 2011, p. 35.*

<sup>9</sup> Vice chairperson of the DP, Jelena Trivan, said that the citizens would create the future of Serbia at the elections on 6 May, and it would be upon them only whether they would elect those who would push the country into war and its citizens into mobilisation, or those who would provide peace, security and prosperity. Jelena Trivan, "Gradjani 6 maja biraju rat ili mir", (Citizens Chose between War and Peace), Blic, 29 March 2012.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this, see Ognjen Pribicevic, "Srpska desnica, izazovi i perspective", (Serbian Right, Challenges and Prospects) *Srpska politička misao*, no. 1. 2011, pp. 143–145.

what he was saying yesterday... for example, Nikolic threatened, not so long ago, to use violence against the delegation which I led to the signing of the SAA in Brussels. Four years before, he threatened to physically eliminate me. And today he is supposedly a proponent of the EU"<sup>11</sup>.

This campaign of the DP against the SPP certainly influenced a share of undecided voters not to vote for this party, but it also disappointed many of the DP's supporters so both parties lost an almost equal number of votes. Specifically, instead of the expected 30 or so percent of votes, both the SPP and the DP obtained around 25%.

Fourth, the elections proved the complete failure of the DP's political engineering. Namely, just like in the previous elections, when by putting G17 Plus on its election list, it practically gave away 25 seats, the DP now contributed widely to the SPS' great election success by providing crucial logistical support to it. This support, above all, entailed opening up a space for the SPS in media establishments close to the DP. Before that, in 2008, the DP had signed the Declaration on Reconciliation with the SPS, thus crucially helping it to draw closer to Socialist International<sup>12</sup>. The DP thereby enabled the SPS to cross over to the winning side of the Revolution of October 5, and become a fully-fledged party within the system. In promoting such attitudes to the SPS, the DP was guided by the assessment that since these two parties had completely different bodies of voters they should help the SPS take as many votes as possible away from the SNS, SRS and DSS<sup>13</sup>.

However, four years later, the DP was abandoned by both the SPS and the G17 Plus, which inevitably raises the question of the validity of the party's strategy to strengthen its partners. When we complement all of this with the fact that the DP also largely aided Nikolic and Vucic's split from the SRP in 2008, we come to the somewhat incredible situation in which the DP, through its political engineering, directly contributed to its own fall from power and strengthened all three members of the future government: the SPS, SPP and G17 Plus. Moreover, in the last elections the DP ceded as many as nine seats to Rasim Ljajic's Social Democratic Party of Serbia which after the elections also abandoned the DP and joined the new government. It is hard to find such an example of failed political engineering anywhere in Europe.

On the other hand, it has to be said that with its policy towards the SPS

<sup>11</sup> B. Tadic, "Samo je naš put siguran" (*Only Our Road Is Safe*) *Novosti*, 19 April 2012.

<sup>12</sup> See Ognjen Pribicevic "Izazovi političkog pomirenja u Srbiji", (*The Challenges of Political Reconciliation in Serbia*) "Medjuetnički odnosi u funkciji pomirenja", (*Interethnic Relations as an Instrument of Reconciliation*), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2010, pp. 80–82.

<sup>13</sup> This opinion is confirmed by Zoran Stojiljković who says that "based on the voters' profile the Socialists are undoubtedly closer to the SRP and the DSS". "Partijski sistem Srbije" (*Party System of Serbia*), *Službeni glasnik*, 2008, p. 475.

and the SPP the DP greatly contributed to calming political fervour down, moderating the political scene in Serbia and even establishing quite a broad consensus on some of the country's most important strategic orientations like Kosovo, Metohija and the EU. Unfortunately for the DP, these undoubtedly generally positive elements of its strategy were not sufficiently recognised by the electorate.

However, the true losers of these elections were the Radicals which for the first time since their foundation did not pass the electoral threshold<sup>14</sup>. The Radicals' failure was probably largely influenced by the emergence of a similar political group – the Dveri Movement – which took a few percent of its votes away, coupled with what was in all probability the wrong decision to nominate Vojislav Sesel's wife as a presidential candidate since she had no previous experience in politics.

Winning only 6.6% of the votes, the LDP also had a surprisingly poor result, which is almost identical to what transpired at the elections of 2007 and 2008. Further, the LDP did not pass the threshold and thus did not enter the City Assembly of Belgrade which had always, and with good reason, been considered the stronghold of this party. The poor election result of the LDP and its "Turnover" coalition was above all influenced by Serbia acquiring EU candidate status, which put an end to the LDP's main argument in criticising the ruling DP. The 2012 elections show that the LDP has a limited capacity when it comes to gaining new votes.

Despite all the negative predictions by polling agencies, Mladjan Dinkic and his new party URS again managed to enter parliament and later on also the government. During the campaign, the URS was engaged in a tough battle to pass the threshold in the face of two primary problems. The first concerned the credibility of its new policy of supporting the de-partisation of Serbia, that is, of removing party-based privileges, recalling that it was precisely Dinkic's former party, the G17 Plus, out of which the URS emerged, that was synonymous with the politicisation of everything, i.e. with the fact that practically nothing in Serbia could be achieved without the party's membership card<sup>15</sup>. In the same way, to a great extent the Serbian public linked the failed privatisation, the fall in the standard of living and deindustrialisation with the policy of the G17 Plus that for the previous ten years had led all key economic

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the Serbian Radical Party's policy during the 1990s, see Ognjen Pribicevic, "Changing Fortunes of the Serbian Radical Right", in: *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, edited by Sabrina Ramet, Pennsylvania State University Press 1999, pp. 193–213.

<sup>15</sup> "In the public, the G17 was repeatedly compared to the JUL from the 1990s. Whoever you voted for during last ten years, the key economic divisions would be taken by this group, for which some claim it is the best job agency in Serbia". Miša Djurković, "Programski identiteti desnih partija u Srbiji krajem prve decenije ovog veka" (*Programme Identity of Right Wing Parties in Serbia at the End of the First Decade of the 21st Century*), p. 212.

and financial departments of the government, with this significantly eroding this party's credibility. Second, one of the DP's more important goals during the election campaign, and particularly of the idea to bring the parliamentary and presidential elections together, was to ensure the URS was no longer in Parliament. The DP' chairman Boris Tadic accused the URS several times of blaming the DP for everything and of trying to hide its responsibility for the policy in the previous period by changing the party's name, stating that, at least at that moment, there would be no room for this party in the coalition that would be led by him after the upcoming elections<sup>16</sup>.

After almost two months of agony, on 27 July 2012 a new government was formed, constituted by the SPP, SPS, and URS. Socialist leader Ivica Dacic was elected Prime Minister. This concluded the long negotiations in which almost all parliamentary parties had participated and during which all agreements and combinations became possible. Therefore, the former ideological and political opponents, the SPS and the URS, not only entered the government but formed an informal alliance with 58 MPs who jointly negotiated with the DP and the SPP. In the same way, the government was formed by the SPP and Mladjan Dinkic's party, the URS, which during the campaign had more than once explicitly said that such an arrangement would be impossible. Finally, the SPS abandoned the alliance with the DP, even though it had a firm agreement to form a coalition with that party after the elections. Thus the SPS repeated the same tactics it had used in 2008, when for the sake of the alliance with the DP it abandoned its then closest partner the DPS that had to a large extent saved it this party from total collapse after 5 October 2000. Namely, in 2004 the DPS invited the SPS to support the minority government of the DSS and G17 Plus, which enabled the SPS to survive the period after 2000. Now the SPS made the same turn as in 2008, except in the opposite direction, and left the DP and formed a government with the SPP. Hence this party, which barely survived 2000, had come a long way from supporting the minority government of the DPS in 2004, through full participation in the government of the DP in 2008, to forming a government with the SPP and gaining the position of Prime Minister in 2012 with less than 10 % of the electorate's support, which clearly says a lot about the indisputable political qualities of its leader, Ivica Dacic. In addition, this development also speaks about the unfulfilled goals of the Revolution of 5 October 2000, disillusioned voters, as well as the wrong strategy of the DP which, by strengthening its partners, first the URS and then the SPS, led itself into opposition.

<sup>16</sup> "... it remains to be seen whether the G17 Plus will qualify for entering the government because, at this moment, that party's leader does not deserve a position in the future government... the G17 has run public health for ten years consecutively, and then all of a sudden they change their name and they are not responsible for anything, and they blame the DP for everything". Boris Tadic, "Novi ljudi za novo vreme", (New People for a New Time), Blic, Beograd, 15 April 2012.

This outcome of the political situation in Serbia might lead to a conclusion that, by such radical and even incredible swings and offers, Serbian political parties have widely repudiated the very essence of the electoral process, which is based on the competition of various ideologies and policies and in which, after the citizens have cast their ballots, governments are formed by parties with similar policies and ideologies. In order to have a normal electoral process, it is equally important that the number of votes won in the elections directly influences which party will gain the position of Prime Minister, as well as how many ministers it will have. As we have seen, in our case these criteria have ceased to be valid which might easily lead to, as happened in Italy<sup>17</sup> at the start of the 1990s and is now being seen in Greece, the total disillusionment of the citizens in the existing parties and the formation of new ones.

Viewing the whole post-electoral process in a more positive light, it might be concluded that also in Serbia, just as in other countries with a parliamentary democracy, a basic rule of this game was confirmed which states that when one does not produce results, one loses elections. This is precisely what happened to the presidential candidate of the DP and the party itself.

In the region of the Western Balkans the changes in Serbia have been received with great suspicion. The main reason for this response is the radical past of leaders of the Serbian Progressive Party, along with certain statements by the new President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolic in which he denied that genocide happened in Srebrenica. In one interview he also referred to Vukovar as a Serbian town. Later on, he denied having said that. Such statements create an atmosphere in the region which can be described as 'wait and see' politics. Moreover, some leaders such as the President of Croatia Josipovic and Izetbegovic from Bosnia and Herzegovina refused to meet Nikolic, asking him to explain and change his statements. Prime Minister Dacic also stated that Croatian Prime Minister Milanovic was not responding to his calls for a meeting.

By contrast, the major Western powers have welcomed the changes in Serbia since they were dissatisfied with the previous President Boris Tadic and his reluctance to move ahead faster as far as Kosovo is concerned. Therefore, despite the fact that key members of the new Serbian government are leaders of a former ultra-nationalistic party - the Serbian Radical Party - their expectations were high in terms of the quicker normalisation of relations between Pristina and Belgrade. Alternatively, maybe their expectations were higher than before exactly because modest nationalists had come to power. Indeed, quite often in the history of world politics

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<sup>17</sup> Radivoje Jovović, "Uzroci hronične nestabilnosti italijanske izvršne vlasti" (*Reasons for the Chronic Instability of Italian Governments*) *Godišnjak FPN, Beograd, no. 5, 2011, p. 193.*

hardliners and ultra-nationalists have been more cooperative in solving difficult ethnic issues than liberals. And to make it clear, as far as the West is concerned the most important question to be solved in the Western Balkans is the Kosovo issue. Other issues, including regional cooperation and internal reforms, while important are not as pivotal as the issue of Kosovo. This is particularly the case as far as Washington and Berlin are concerned.

Therefore, immediately after being created the new government in Serbia encountered strong pressure from German politicians. Among others, Ruprecht Polenz, President of the German parliament's foreign policy committee (CDU), Martin Sulz, President of the European Parliament, (SPD) and Andreas Sokenhof, high representative of the ruling CDU who personally visited Belgrade, called on the Serbian government to recognise Kosovo before it entered the EU. Moreover, Sokenhof asked government in Belgrade to sign a document with Pristina about good neighbourly relations similar to the document signed in 1972 by the then two German states.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the EU Commission issued a statement on 10 October 2012 about Serbia's progress towards the EU in which, for the first time "the territorial integrity of Kosovo" is mentioned. With such a statement the EU wanted to stress that any division of Kosovo will be unacceptable. Simultaneously, radical requirements such as insisting on the recognition of Kosovo or establishing neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo were not mentioned at all.

At the beginning, the new government was confused by such strong pressure from the West but later Prime Minister Dacic went to Brussels to meet Kosovo Prime Minister Taci under the umbrella of the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy Catrin Eston. The new government officials have several times underlined that they will implement all agreements adopted by the previous Tadic government and will carry on with dialogue with Pristina. Moreover, they have said that the dialogue will be raised to a higher political level. The main issues will be Serbian institutions in the north of Kosovo, integrative border management, and electricity and communication. Several days later, US State Secretary Clinton visited Belgrade together with Catrin Eston and gave strong support for the dialogue between Dacic and Taci.<sup>19</sup> Surprisingly enough, she did not mention the need for Serbia to recognise Kosovo's independence; while she did mention that Kosovo is independent she did not ask Serbia to recognise it. She did not even mention the necessity for Serbia to disband the so-called parallel institutions of the Serbian population in the north of Kosovo.

<sup>18</sup> *Blic*, Belgrade, 18 September 2012.

<sup>19</sup> For more about recent negotiations on the future of Kosovo, see: James Ker-Lindsay, "Kosovo, The Path to Contested Statehood in the Balkans", I.B. Tauris & Co LT, London, 2009.

Such statements give an opportunity to the Serbian government to continue the dialogue with Pristina in the future without requiring the recognition of Kosovo which, for the time being no one government in Serbia could accept. It is therefore predictable that Serbia will carry on with its internal reforms, continue with the dialogue with Pristina and the process of EU integration. The difficult question of the recognition of Kosovo has been left to one side and will, presumably, be raised just before Serbia's accession to full EU membership which will not happen in the next 5 or 7 years. Until then, hopefully many unresolved issues between Belgrade and Pristina will be sorted out. It will be crucial to solve the problem of the north of Kosovo mainly inhabited by a Serbian population which does not want to live in an independent Kosovo. In any event, Western powers have given enough time to Serbia for it to continue with all necessary reforms which, at the moment, is the most important step for Serbia.

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