

Campaign Watch 2012

Newsletter 02



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Newsletter No. 2

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Parliamentary and local elections in Serbia are scheduled to take place on May 6, 2012. A total of 7,058.683¹ voters will elect a new 250-seat National Assembly, as well as mayors in major cities and deputies in over 160 municipal assemblies.

There are 87 political parties officially entered in the *Registry of Political Parties* with the Ministry for Human and Minorities' Rights, State Administration and Local Self-government, and recognized by Serbian authorities. 9 parties and/or coalitions have so far registered their election lists. Following is a review of these contenders, their leaders heading each ticket, their election slogans and essentials of their election platforms:

List No.	Party/Coalition	Front-runner	Policies	Slogan	Note
1.	DS – <i>Democratic Party</i>	Boris Tadić	“Both Europe and Kosovo”; new jobs, investments; social security	<i>Jobs. Investments. Security.</i>	Coalition with several smaller parties
2.	SRS – <i>Serbian Radical Party</i>	Vojislav Šešelj	Against EU-membership; economic and social demagoguery; no change in Kosovo policies	<i>I choose Serbia</i>	Runs alone
3.	URS – <i>United Regions of Serbia</i>	Mladjan Dinkić	Decentralization; Regionalization; Banishment of political parties	<i>Strong Regions – Strong Serbia</i>	Runs alone

¹T

Total population of Serbia as per Oct. 2011 census is 7,565. 761.

			from public enterprises; tax reform		
4.	Preokret – <i>Turnaround</i>	Čedomir Jovanović	Serbia in Euro-Atlantic integrations; abandonment of the hitherto Kosovo “Both Europe and Kosovo” policy; modernization of state and society	Truth!	LDP – <i>Liberal Democratic Party</i> in Coalition with the SPO – <i>Serbian Renewal Movement</i> , a labor union and five smaller parties
5.	SNS – <i>Serbian Progressive Party</i>	Tomislav Nikolić	Employment; social justice; fight against corruption; foreign policy “Both East and West” with clear reliance on Russia	Let’s Set Serbia into Motion!	In coalition with smaller “patriotic” parties
6.	DSS – <i>Democratic Party of Serbia</i>	Vojislav Koštunica	Against Serbia’s EU and NATO membership; military and political neutrality; tougher stance on Kosovo; strong reliance on Russian economic aid and loans	For Serbia – You know why	Runs alone
7.	SPS – <i>Socialist Party of Serbia</i>	Ivica Dačić	Social justice; fight against crime and corruption; no change in Kosovo policies	Socially just Serbia	In coalition with present partners: JS – <i>Unified Serbia</i> , and PUPS – <i>United Pensioners’ Party of Serbia</i>

1. Political parties representing ethnic minority communities have voiced grave concern over the authorities' decision to require each contending party or coalition to submit 10,000 signatures in support of their tickets if they want to run. Minorities' parties are thus put on equal footing with other political parties, although it is hard to expect very small ethnic minority parties to be able to collect the required number of signatures. Political parties which include the *Montenegrin Party*, *Democratic Alliance of Bulgarians*, *Union of Bunjevci in Bačka*, *Movement of Hungarian Hope*, *Slovak Party*, *Democratic Macedonians' Party*, *Ruthenian Democratic Party* and *Hungarians' Civic Alliance* repeatedly addressed the Constitutional Court of Serbia and argued that while the law stipulates that only one thousand signatures be collected to support the registration of an ethnic minority political party, this regulation requires ten times that number to register an election list. They insisted that this represents a clear case of discrimination along ethnic lines.

The Constitutional Court has not reacted to these parties' complaint.

2. Although the campaign gains momentum daily, there has been only one reference to fair play as one of the basic requirements to be fulfilled if an electoral competition is to be considered free and democratic: President of the Municipal Assembly of the City of Niš and member of the *Socialist Party of Serbia* leadership, Mile Ilić, called upon all contenders at the local election to sign an "Agreement on Fair Conduct" during the election campaign. Mr. Ilić is remembered as the initiator of [former Serbian and FRY President] Slobodan Milošević's candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize 1995.

The initiative - signed on March 23 - was accepted by five political parties, whereas the remaining three view it as a "non-aggression pact" and refused to join.

No such initiative has been taken by any of the contenders at the national level.

3. Speaking at a March 13, 2012 round table discussion on the relations between Russia and the Balkans, Russian Ambassador Alexander Konuzin stressed that "the European option for Balkan countries should not be viewed as an option without an alternative": "There is talk about apparent advantages of this orientation of the development of relations in Europe, but less is heard about known risks", he added. The Ambassador's remarks were criticized by numerous observers and representatives of political groups advocating Serbia's accelerated accession to the EU: the view was expressed that such statements represent a form of direct interference into the election campaign. On the other hand, those critical of the West cite the "argument" that some Western ambassadors -- notably US Ambassador Ms. Warlick and Germany's Mr. Maas -- made public appearances at launching ceremonies of Serbian subsidiaries of their respective countries' businesses. However, it should be noted that Western ambassadors did not make political statements on those occasions.

4. The *Republic Broadcasting Agency* (RRA) issued on March 10, 2012 a set of rules governing the conduct of radio and TV broadcasters during the election campaign. These rules stipulate that during the prime time (between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m.) TV stations are not allowed to broadcast political parties' election spots and other commercial election programs longer than five minutes. In clear violation of these rules, the national television RTS aired on March 9, 14, 15, 20 and 21 (beginning each day at 9 p.m.) delayed transmission of Vojislav Šešelj's closing statement at the ICTY war crimes trial against him at The Hague. In his capacity as President of the *Serbian Radical Party*, Mr. Šešelj heads his Party's ticket at the upcoming election. Throughout his closing statement at the trial he insisted that his defense at the trial has clear political contents and the intention to help SRS's election campaign.

Observers argue that weakening the ruling DS's main opponent (*Serbian Progressive Party* which came into existence after a split in SRS itself 2008) is behind the decision to increase Mr. Šešelj's public presence. This intention is seen also in the Government's decision to issue guarantees for Mr. Šešelj's temporary release from detention (pending ICTY verdict in the case against him) for health reasons, although Mr. Šešelj himself has not formally demanded early release or such guarantee from the Serbian Government. National daily *Politika*, which is partially owned by the state, carried on March 28 an extensive report on the issue. The report, printed on the front page and page 6, was illustrated by large color photographs of SRS's election propaganda poster featuring Mr. Šešelj pictures and the inscription „We do not want to join the European Union!“ – one of SRS's campaign slogans.

5. In a separate development, Boris Tadić, President of the Republic of Serbia and President of the ruling *Democratic Party* (DS)², on almost daily visits to numerous towns and villages throughout Serbia opens factories, visits companies, gives on-the-spot-guidance to farmers, small business owners and wine producers - an unprecedented series of events extensively covered by the national radio and TV networks under the pretext that Mr. Tadić carries out these activities in his capacity as head of state. Interestingly, the three words he uses in his addresses during this campaign trail – jobs, investments and security – coincide with his party's election *motto*. The *Democratic Party's* website dutifully registers the President's activities as part of the DS's campaign and reports on them extensively.

² Ever since the adoption of the present Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, there has been a controversy as to whether Mr. Tadić's occupancy of both posts represents a violation of its Art. 115 which reads: „The President of the Republic may not perform another public function or professional duty“.

Democratic Party TV spots featuring Mr. Tadić (without specifying whether he stars in them as head of state or party leader) are broadcast on numerous stations nationwide.

6. Following a conversation with Mr. Mikael Ohlsson, a manager in the Swedish furniture stores chain IKEA, President Tadić addressed the media on March 15 and announced that IKEA will open five stores throughout Serbia beginning 2013 (two in Belgrade, as well as in Niš, Novi Sad, Čačak and Kragujevac, respectively) and „thus cover the entire Serbia“.

However, in a letter sent to prospective business partners in Serbia on March 19, IKEA management announces that only one store will be opened in Serbia by 2015.

7. Financial aspects of the 2012 campaign remain one of the best kept secrets: while all contending parties insist that sources and amounts of financial means they are spending for the campaign are kept within the framework outlined in the *Financing of Political Activities Act* (law passed on June 14, 2011), there is a high degree of unanimity among them that details should not be exposed to public scrutiny. The FPAA stipulates that political parties running for election will receive subsidies from the Budget of the Republic of Serbia in the total amount of 0.1% of the 940.157.524.000 RSD budgetary expenditure foreseen for 2012. Having in mind very high costs of the campaign, it is difficult to imagine that state subsidies, membership fees and donations from the impoverished citizens would suffice to fund the campaign as diversified as it is³.

8. *United Regions of Serbia* nominated Dragi Damjanović, President of the Municipal Assembly of Žagubica and former MP for *G17+* party, for the third mayoral term. At a rally in his hometown on March 10, Mr. Damjanović – who is also a pediatrician in a local hospital - attacked Aleksandra Đorđević, a TV journalist who was sent by her station to cover the event. „As“, a privately owned TV station, is known for its critical attitude towards the mayor's policies. Ms. Đorđević sustained head injuries and a light concussion. Dr. Damjanović denies that the incident took place in spite of a video footage available on Youtube.

9. In a festive atmosphere and in front of running cameras a seven-meter (improvised) bridge was opened on March 27 in Donje Vlase near Niš. The solemn ceremony was conducted by Branislav Jovanović, Director of the City Development Directorate appointed to

³ The national TV charges 3,300 to 16,500 RSD per second of ad time; a single billboard is rented at 7,000 to 12,500 RSD per day; a public rally hall rent costs 500,000 to 2.500,000 RSD, at the exchange rate of appr. 110 RSD to one EUR. Costs of ad time on national TV - if used daily to the maximum of five minutes – throughout the campaign would amount close to 1 million EUR. Expenditure in other media including newspapers and magazines, as well other related costs (transport and travel, production, etc) – excluded.

that post following a nomination by the *G17 plus* party, presently a part of the *United Regions of Serbia* coalition.