

Campaign Watch 2012

Newsletter 03



This project was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.

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April 17, 2012

Parliamentary, local and presidential elections in Serbia are scheduled to take place on May 6, 2012. A total of 7,058.683 voters will elect a new 250-seat National Assembly, as well as mayors in major cities and deputies in over 160 city and municipal assemblies.

New Social Democracy of Serbia is the 88th entry 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.

Additional four election lists have been registered by the Republic Election Commission (RIK) as contenders at the parliamentary election. Following is a brief 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
8.	Dveri - Gate	Prof. Branimir Nešić	Extreme rightist, xenophobic ideology disguised as uphold of traditional values (faith, family, honor)	<i>For Serbia's life</i>	Runs alone
9.	VAJDASAGI MAGYAR SZOVETSEG - PASZTOR ISTVAN – Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians – Istvan Pasztor	Istvan Pasztor	Restoration of pre-1990s Vojvodina autonomy	<i>For Vojvodina in a normal Serbia</i>	Runs alone

10.	RS – Reformist Party	Prof. Milan Višnjić	“Serbia’s economic, cultural and social renaissance based on principles of solidarity and democratic humanism”.	Power of the South	A regional party in Niš, ambitioned to expand throughout Serbia
11.	SDA – Democratic Action Party	Sulejman Uglijanin			
12.	PRS – Workers’ and Peasants’ Movement	Prof. Zoran Dragišić	Social justice, struggle against organized crime and corruption		

Following President Boris Tadić’s decision to “shorten” his tenure and thus provoke a snap presidential election, President of the People’s Assembly, Ms. Slavica Djukić-Dejanović, set May 6th, 2012 as the day of presidential election as well.

List No. ¹	Candidate	Runs for	Note
1.	Boris Tadić	DS-led Coalition <i>Choice for a Better Life</i>	
2.	Ivica Dačić	Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Unified Pensioners’ Party of Serbia (PUPS) and Unified Serbia (JS)	
3.	Vojislav Koštunica	Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)	
4.	Zoran Stanković	United Regions of Serbia (URS)	
5.	Jadranka Šešelj	Radical Paerty (SRS)	ICTY war crimes indictee Vojislav Šešelj’s wife
6.	Istvan Pasztor	Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians	
7.	Čedomir Jovanović	Preokret - Turnaround	
8.	Tomislav Nikolić		

¹ The lists’ consecutive numbers will be decided by a drawing on April 20, after the nomination process is concluded.

		SNS-led Coalition	
9.	Muamer Zukorlić	Independent candidate	Chief mufti of the Islamic Community in Serbia
10.	Zoran Dragišić	Workers' and Peasants' Movement	
11.	Vladan Glišić	Dveri	
12.	Danica Grujičić	Socialdemocratic Alliance (SDS)	Not yet confirmed due to insufficient number of supporting signatures.

1. President Tadić's decision to "shorten" his mandate -- an intentional usage of a term not enshrined in the Constitution in order to avoid the word "resignation" – with the view to boost his Party's (DS) campaign for the parliamentary election, opens a range of questions relating to legal, political and moral aspects of his step and its consequences, observers argue. Immediately after handing his resignation to the Speaker of parliament, Mr. Tadić submitted his candidacy for the same post.
2. The official website of the President of the Republic (www.predsednik.rs) has been put offline as of the day Mr. Tadić decided to "shorten" the mandate: "The official presentation of the President of the Republic will not be functional till a new President is elected", the homepage informs. The website contains information not only about the person who until recently held the post, but also on the constitutional framework, duties and rights of the head of state. This move is regarded conducive to the conclusion that an individual person and not the institution of head of state is at its helm.
3. Tomislav Nikolić, presidential candidate for the *Serbian Progressive Party* (SNS), said in a speech at an April 12 rally that he will "not consider [himself] bound" by the agreements on Kosovo reached during the EU-brokered negotiations between Belgrade and Priština.
4. In a series of public addresses during the campaign trail, President of the *Socialist Party of Serbia* (SPS), First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Ivica Dačić pledged to "arrest foreign investors" who attempt to violate Serbian workers' right to organizing themselves in trade unions.
5. In a March 29 speech at a closed session of the Belgrade chapter of his Party, SNS deputy leader and frontrunner in the mayoral election race in Belgrade, Aleksandar Vučić, addressed the issue of gender quotas, spoke insultingly of women and decremented their aptitude to hold political office. He said: that "out of a hundred SNS female candidates, maybe five or six are worthy of entering Parliament". His statement was secretly recorded and uploaded on *YouTube*.

6. Speaking in a widely acclaimed talk show on the B92 television on April 15, Ms. Jorgovanka Tabaković, a member of the SNS top leadership, was asked about her Party's view on the ICTY war crimes indictee Gen. Ratko Mladić. Her reply: "The truth about Srebrenica has not yet been investigated, but General Ratko Mladić is a tragic figure who was a good Serbian soldier. He was indeed an honest Serbian soldier and by virtue of that a hero".
7. It was on April 8, the International Roma Day, that inhabitants of the Belgrade suburb of Resnik staged a violent protest against the resettlement of Roma families from one of the around 150 slum settlements in Belgrade to an area with container housing in that part of the city, provided by the City of Belgrade. 14 policemen were injured, two of them severely. Although the election campaign is in full swing – or, maybe, exactly because of that – none of the politicians endeavored to go to Resnik, acquaint themselves with the situation and express a clear view on the issue. Belgrade Lord Mayor Dragan Djilas underlined that the Resnik citizens' protest contained racist features. Soon thereafter, however, he distanced himself from his own characterization of the incident.
8. Contenders in Serbian elections continue to make unrealistic promises and announce spectacular plans if elected. One hundred billion Euros in foreign investment over the next ten years represents one of the cornerstones of the *Serbian Progressive Party's* (SNS) campaign. *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DSS) pledges to "completely" open Serbian economy for cooperation with Russia, and announces that ten billion Euros in Russian loans and investments will flow into Serbia if DSS is in power. DS President Boris Tadić pledges that by 2020 modern highways will connect Serbia with all neighboring countries. So far, such connection exists only with Croatia.
9. Two of the candidates for the Municipal Assembly in Lazarevac, nominated by the Socialist *Party of Serbia*, belong to a group of "Kolubara" coal mining company managers indicted by the Organized Crime Prosecutor on charges of corruption, misappropriation of funds and misuse of authority.
10. In an interview to *Politika* on April 5, 2012, Ms. Zorana Marković, Director of the Anti-corruption Agency, expressed her "general impression" that provisions of the Anti-corruption Agency Act pertaining to the ban on public office holders to use public resources in the election campaign are "respected to a large extent". The Act, which regulates public office holders' conduct in disposing with public resources entrusted to them, stipulates which category of public servants will be exempt from the ban: those elected into office in direct elections, i.e. the President of the Republic and the 250 deputies in the People's Assembly, as well as those whose personal security has been assessed by proper authorities as jeopardized. The latter category comprises a large number of cabinet ministers, state secretaries and heads of key government agencies. This provision explains why numerous government cars, police escorts and security personnel are to be seen at election rallies and other related events.
11. Whereas slogans on social issues such as jobs, pensions and health care occupy high positions in all parties' and coalitions' campaign -- whereby populist attempts to court

the electorate with unrealistic promises dominate the campaign – a serious debate on most of the burning issues affecting citizens' everyday life are conspicuously absent. Apart from general statements and slogans directed at relevant target groups, there is no serious attempt to address issues related to unemployment, education, environment, Kosovo and, importantly, the heavy burden of the heritage of the 1990s wars which constitute the very foundation of Serbia's present misfortune.

12. One of the leading candidates on the SNS-led ticket, President of the *New Serbia* Party (NS) Velimir Ilić, misused interviews given to a local television station in Čačak for extremely hostile and insulting attacks on DS President Boris Tadić and *Preokret* frontrunner Čedomir Jovanović. Following another barrage of insults, unfounded accusations and hostile statements expressed by Mr. Ilić in an interview to "Galaksija" TV -- a station owned by the Municipality of Čačak -- local chapter of the *Preokret* Coalition filed criminal charges against him.
13. Serbian law enforcement authorities' success in apprehending a criminal gang in illegal possession of an estimated 100 million Euro worth painting by Paul Cezanne (stolen in an armed robbery in Switzerland 2008) played a role in the election campaign as well. In a widely publicized statement on the incident, Interior Minister Dačić complained that he had not been informed on the ongoing investigation, the subsequent arrest of the criminal group and seizure of the painting. This "oversight" can also be viewed as an apparent attempt to challenge the Minister's competence and portray him as unable to control his Ministry – a move intended to counter the very essence of his campaign propaganda for both parliamentary and presidential elections, whereby Mr. Dačić is celebrated as "the most competent and efficient" government minister.
14. A group of activists of the *Serbian Progressive Party* (SNS) and *United Serbia* (JS) were arrested and filed criminal and misdemeanor charges against in the town of Kučovo following a fight they entered against each other over where their parties' campaign posters can and cannot be displayed. One person suffered serious injuries during the fight, and additional three persons were hurt lightly.
15. Several human rights and democracy groups in Belgrade, Niš and Šabac possess information that communal and public enterprises in the three cities -- run by managers appointed by political parties in power there -- are hiring large numbers of job seekers under the condition that they and their family members vote for those parties' lists. As budgetary regulations and scarce funds forbid new employment and spending on wages in the public sector, new employees are remunerated from private sources i.e. businesses supporting those parties. *Asocijacija DUGA* (Rainbow Association) from Šabac became aware that employees in a number of public enterprises and utilities have been threatened with loss of employment if they refuse to support the candidates suggested by the management. Targeted were especially members of the Roma community employed in the street-cleaning enterprise. Although this information originates from several trustworthy sources, it was not possible to verify it officially; hence the absence of names of parties, firms and their managers.

16. One of the election tickets registered in the Belgrade municipality of Zvezdara bears the name "Group of Citizens – Tomislav Nikolić". Both central and local leadership of the *Serbian Progressive Party* (SNS) condemn this move as deliberate attempt to confuse and manipulate less literate and educated voters by posting a ticket called identically as SNS president and front runner.
17. *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) activists in Sremska Mitrovica report that numerous citizens who have publicly profiled themselves as LDP supporters, activists and prospective voters have received "friendly advice", warnings and even threats. In door-to-door actions, representatives of the ruling coalition visit them and warn against "wasted vote" if given to *Preokret*, or threat with the loss of employment.
18. *Serbian Radical Party* (SRS) announced that each person elected to Parliament on its ticket will have to sign a blank €100,000 (onehunderdthousand) cheque and thus guarantee that he/she will not change the parliamentary party. This decision comes as SRS's reaction to the court ruling that it is MPs rather than their constituent parties² who has the exclusive right to dispose with the parliamentary mandate. Observers are unanimous in interpreting this step as fixing an "initial price of a seat in Parliament" once the trading season after the election begins.
19. A priest in Zaječar, a city in South-Eastern Serbia, forbade activists of the *Workers' and Peasants' Movement* (PRS) to hand out Easter eggs with Party's insignia and political messages imprinted together with the traditional ornaments dyed for the occasion.
20. Offices of the ruling *Democratic Party* (DS) in Novi Sad were hit during the night between Apr. 15 and 16 by a bullet. In an unofficial statement to the media, a police spokesman said it was a stray bullet fired during a street fight in the vicinity, whereas DS Deputy President Jelena Trivan said that "the line has been crossed" and the bullet "was fired with the intention to kill someone".
21. EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle openly expressed in an interview to *Radio Free Europe* "hope that Serbian citizens will vote for political forces who are in favor of Serbia's accession to the EU". Having in mind that Serbia's EU membership is a highly contentious issue, between those who -- regardless of how sincerely -- advocate (DS and SNS) and those who fiercely oppose (DSS and SRS) it, Mr. Füle's statement has to be viewed as interference in Serbian election campaign.

² Article 102 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia stipulates that MPs are "free to irrevocably put their mandates at their parliamentary parties' disposal" – a formula camouflaging imperative mandate.