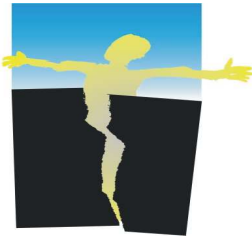


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A Fresh Advance in Euro-Atlantic Orientation

Ever since it consolidated its pro-European course the Serbian cabinet has been confronted by the anti-European and anti-West “alliance” aware that such development posed a threat to its ideological concept. Namely, it feels threatened by the process forcing Serbia to put an end to the national and state question – i.e. to give up its territorial aspiration towards Bosnia-Herzegovina in the first place. At the political level, the “alliance” or the block includes Vojislav Kostunica and his party, Tomislav Nikolic despite the fact that his party changed its rhetoric, Vojislav Seselj’s Radicals and Velimir Ilic’s New Serbia. The block, however, exceeds the political sphere encompassing influential circles in the Serb Orthodox Church, in the media and among academicians and cultural elites. Objectively speaking, sided with them are parts of the so-called second Serbia – i.e. segments of the civil society and outstanding individuals not recognizing that ousting of the Democratic Party and Boris Tadic would postpone the anyway fragile and thorny transformation of the Serbian society.

The block aims, above all, at toppling the cabinet and calling early parliamentary elections hoping the constellation of powers in the post-election period would secure it a parliamentary majority. Its comprehensive strategy also counts on the effects of social and economic crisis weighting almost all the strata. In this context, it seeks support among the

young who are frustrated with their uncertain prospects, among the unemployed, among trade unions and with practically all transitional losers.

Escalation of violence over the past months (beating to death of a French national, cancellation of the Gay Parade for security reasons, etc.) testifies of further fascization that undermines the very foundations of the social order. Faced with such obvious threat, the Democratic Party had to finally take definite stances on the issues it has treated with ambivalence. Most illustrative in this context are recent public addresses by President Boris Tadic and other high officials of his party.



Corax (danas.rs)

Anti-European Block Goes on the Offensive

As the pro-European block, led by the Democratic Party, failed to win a sufficient majority of votes in the 2008 parliamentary elections, the cabinet has been unable to formulate a clear-cut European policy. Various circumstances

and developments – such as the effects of the global crisis, the visit by US Vice-President Joseph Biden and international factors' more active approach to the Western Balkans – influenced the cabinet's shift towards a stronger position on Euro-Atlantic integration.

Crystallization of such orientation provoked strong reactions by the conservative block. These reactions were evident on various occasions but their goal was the same – destabilization of the cabinet and the President of the Republic. Adoption of the controversial Public Information Law, cancellation of the Gay Parade and waves of uninhibited violence and assaults at foreign nationals probably best manifested the said response arguing that the government had no control over the situation in the country. Besides, during the parliamentary debate on the set of military laws the Democratic Party and Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac were accused of practically preparing the terrain for Serbia's membership of NATO. Similar allegations are to be expected in the upcoming parliamentary debate on the statute of Vojvodina and the relevant Law on Transfer of Authority.



Boris Tadic

President Boris Tadic's response to all those allegations was surprisingly precise and resolute about the frame and tenets on which the government would insist.

His first major statement occasioned by the death of young Frenchman Bruce Taton – “This is the result of an unbroken chain of violence marking 1990s, heinous crimes committed in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia, the support to the Unit

for Special Operation /JSO/ on strike, political discourse that generates unrestrained anger against the so-called traitors...and the atmosphere of hatred for any minority ...”¹ – announced this fresh advance made by the Democratic Party.

In his interview with the NIN weekly issue of October 8, 2009, President Tadic explained his point in detail. He laid a strong emphasis on the survived state structures that used to be in the service of Milosevic's regime, on the police and judiciary in the first place. “The government enjoys no public support whatsoever for a fundamental reform of the society – on the contrary, it is being obstructed all the time,” he said. “Some political organizations are encouraging extremist groups and propagating violence as an ideology of sorts,” he underlined. In this context, he added that “violence was often used as an alibi for Kosovo” and that “some representatives of the opposition are invoking violence in the streets and predicting the fall of the government in the streets, too.”

In both interviews Boris Tadic clearly positioned his Democratic Party vis-à-vis the recent past. In other words, he earmarked Milosevic's legacy as a root cause of “distorted values” that “have introduced crime into political structures, judiciary, the police, the army, intelligence system, healthcare, sports and education.” More importantly, he clearly indicated his option for “membership of EU, value-based changes in Serbia's political society, normalization of media space, favorable conditions for foreign investment and reform of the judiciary.”²

Serbia needs to change the inherited value system, he said, adding, “Solution to our problems lies in ourselves, in our changed attitude towards work, in our respect one for another, in our decent behavior, in our attitudes that would not jeopardize lives of other people, accuse others of treason and declare anyone an enemy of the society.”

So defined political orientation of the Democratic Party practically closes the door for it to make any future

¹ *Politika*, October 2, 2009.

² *Pečat*, 9. oktobra 2009.

coalition with Tomislav Nikolic's /SNS/ and Vojislav Kostunica's /DSS/ parties.

Reactions by Conservative Block

Boris Tadic's fresh advance has not been appropriately welcomed by the circles the support of which would have been only logical – the part of the civil society and public figures. On the other hand, conservative circles received it more manifestly and fiercely, obviously having better insight into its implications. Scores of newspaper stories refer to the government as “a gang with no responsibility for the nation and the state” and blame it for being after “an even bigger defeat” implying final redemption from “the unforgivable sin” - the unbroken chain of “the 1990s legacy.”³

The fact that Boris Tadic's stands are close to the heart of a part of the anti-war opposition is used for allegations such as “our government is under the vassalage of the mentors of the so-called second Serbia.”⁴

Accusing Tadic of having adopted the “terminology of the second Serbia,” Slobodan Antonic, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and commentator of the *Pecat* magazine, writes, “The Democratic Party has no political idea of its own, let alone some more or less defined partisan ideology.” For him, the Democratic Party is “pragmatic” in the basest, financial-utilitarian sense of the term.⁵



Slobodan Antonic

³ Milorad Vucelic, *Pecat*, „Serbia like Guernica,” October 9, 2009.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Reactions to the government's and the Democratic Party's stronger positioning vis-à-vis the pro-European course reveal Serbia's ideological confusion and complexity of its situation. The country's reformist potential is fragile and constantly under the attack of the powerful conservative block. Therefore, is it most important that the international community shows more understanding for the government's delicate situation and the President's position.

Toppling of the incumbent cabinet would either postpone Serbia's movement towards EU or create space for fresh consolidation of the anti-European block. The opposition's changeable rhetoric – primarily that of the Serb Progressive Party and its leader Tomislav Nikolic – is no guarantee whatsoever for its genuine endorsement of the course presently pursued by the incumbent government.

A positive approach from EU – evident in concrete actions such as the efforts to include Serbia into the “white Schengen list” and unfreeze the Interim Trade Agreement – is most valuable for keeping Serbia on its present pro-European track.

Putting an end to Serbia's state issue is also EU's obligation to be met, in the first place, through amendment of the Dayton Accords so as to secure a functional state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. EULEX that takes over substantive control over the entire territory of Kosovo and starts implementing the agreement recently signed with Serbian Ministry of the Interior without unnecessary delay is another major factor of regional stabilization. All this would greatly help Serbia itself to start coping resolutely with its own transformation. The transformation agenda includes the statute of Vojvodina, amendment of the Constitution, decentralization and regionalization, status of ethnic minorities and the reform of the media space. Such transformation preconditions a break-up with Milosevic's legacy.