

# Helsinki *bulletin*



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## EU CANDIDACY POSTPONED: A TEST FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTY



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EU summit conference of December 9 denied Serbia EU candidacy: Serbia had failed to demonstrate readiness to see to the problems discussed in Brussels within Belgrade-Pristina talks – barricades, unimpeded functioning of KFOR and EULEX in the entire territory of Kosovo and Kosovo’s participation in regional forums. What EU actually wants Serbia to do is to put an end to the “borders issue” in the

Balkans. Hits shot at KFOR troops were among key factors against Serbia’s EU candidacy.

The present government that four years ago won the elections with its pro-European option (the coalition “For a European Serbia”) was caught in its own trap embodied in the policy of “both EU and Kosovo.” Defeat of the national policy left the country disoriented, in

confusion and without a driving force for social cohesion. Sitting on a fence about charting a new policy, the present government missed the opportunity to impose itself on the society as a visionary option. It is incapable, therefore, of keeping its promises and making the country's EU course irrevocable through obtaining EU candidacy.

With radicalization of the situation in Kosovo this spring Belgrade for the first time went public with the partition scenario for Kosovo. Neither Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit nor her clear-cut messages about candidacy preconditions changed Belgrade's attitude. Its illusion that partition, notwithstanding all, could pass crashed against the wall: EU was resolute about no more changes of borders in the region.

Tardy attempts to meet EU requests – President Tadic's appeal to Serbs in north Kosovo to withdraw themselves from barricades (November 29) and the two-day talks between Borislav Stefanovic and Edita Tahiri in Brussels (November 30 – December 1) – failed. Barricades were not removed and the progress made in the dialogue with Pristina (integrated management of border crossings) turned ineffective in the field. Whatever the government did at the eleventh hour was not enough to alleviate Germany's skepticism about Serbia's intent to normalize relations with Kosovo in foreseeable future.

Serbia's clinging to the illusion about Kosovo's partition considerably rests on the assessment that EU is weak and could soon disintegrate. Russia's support to North Kosovo Serbs' right to secession only fueled this illusion. Moreover, Russia has organized Kosovo Serbs' petitioning for Russian citizenship. The entire campaign was meant to demonstrate that Kosovo Serbs did not trust Tadic and that he himself was too weak to solve the Kosovo problem.

Serbia paid dear for the debacle in Brussels – and this particularly refers to the ruling coalition, which let down numbers of citizens. Reactions to the denied candidacy were mostly emotional and marked by anti-European feelings.<sup>1</sup> The general stance was that Serbia was treated unfairly whereas neighboring countries were commended for lesser achievements.

The Democratic Party is the most responsible for the situation: it demonstrated absence of leadership and courage to face up the reality, rationally acknowledge "national" defeats and look towards the future. This political pivot's actions against a new backdrop are now crucial.

The European Council messaged that it trusted no more Serbia's commitment to European course and its promises that were not kept. That was a hard blow in the face of Serbia's anyway fragile pro-European orientation and political and social forces it embodied. Facing confusion about basic preconditions for EU candidacy (putting an end to the border issue and normalization of regional relations) Serbia now enters a phase of political uncertainty. And this opens the door to radical forces only eager to further complicate the situation in Kosovo's north.

## LATE RESPONSE

The government has hinted a denied candidacy but kept emphasizing Serbia's commitment to European integration. And yet on the eve of the EU summit it intensified its candidacy campaign. President Tadic's interview with the TV "Prva" on November 13, 2011 is most illustrative of his and the government's ambivalence. The President fueled people's hopes

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1 Findings of the public opinion poll conducted by Nova Srpska Politicka Misao show a dramatic fall in the support for the membership of EU: in November 2011 only 47 per cent of interviewees were in favor of European integrations.

that the government would manage to make a breakthrough in its policy, particularly when it comes to Kosovo. He said Kosovo was primarily a European issue, whereas Russia, South Africa and China “are faraway countries” – which meant, as he put it, that the Kosovo problem had to be settled in tandem with EU. “Those who believe that Russia, China or Brazil treat Kosovo as their burning issue must be very naïve. Kosovo will be a burning issue for EU and US in the next ten year, after all they waged a war for it,” he said.<sup>2</sup>

But in the period between this interview and his first appeal ever to Serbs in North Kosovo to remove barricades (November 29) his rhetoric was quite the opposite.<sup>3</sup> When KFOR troops tried to dismantle barricades at the Jarinje border crossing they were confronted by local “defenders.” A day later (November 28) several KFOR soldiers were wounded with live ammunition in the village of Jagnjenica. Even according to Belgrade-seated media, Zvonko Veselinovic<sup>4</sup>, controversial businessman from Mitrovica, often mentioned in the context of Serbs’ persistence on barricades, was the one who fired shots at KFOR troops.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that most of wounded soldiers were Germans and Austrians sharpened their

<sup>2</sup> Politika, November 14, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Tomislav Nikolic denied support to Boris Tadic in the matter of barricades under the excuse that only Serbs in North Kosovo could make such a decision („They who live down there are the only ones who know that they are going through.”)

<sup>4</sup> The crew of the “Insider” TV show obtained a list of 70 Serbs registered as employees of PTT Kosovo. Having emerged from Serbia’s PTT, this is now a shareholding company in which the Kosovo government is a majority shareholder. The list includes persons such as Zvonko Veselinovic, his wife Ljiljana Bozovic and brother Zarko Veselinovic. According to official sources from Kosovo PTT the three have been the company’s full-time technicians until recently.

<sup>5</sup> Novi Magazin, December 1, 2011.

respective governments’ stance about Serbia’s candidacy. In this Germany and Austria were sided by the Great Britain. Addressing Bundestag on December 2, Angela Merkel said pre-conditions for Serbia’s EU candidacy had not been met “so far.”<sup>6</sup> Only normalization of relations with Kosovo secures Serbia’s course towards EU, she said, adding, “EU and German government have formulated their expectations (from Serbia) in due time and detailed the steps it should take.”<sup>7</sup>

Disagreement within EU resulted in an ambiguous stance by the ministerial meeting of member-states of December 5. A final decision was left to heads of state or government. And that was when Austria came up with the “conditional candidacy” option.

The action of dismantling the barricades (reerected on the very eve of December 9) in Jagnjenica and at Jarinje border crossing was not convincing enough to secure Serbia a candidacy status. A debate on it was postponed till March 2012 but only under the condition a progress in the dialogue with Pristina is made and agreements reached implemented in the meantime and free movement and EULEX control over the entire territory of Kosovo enabled.

## DEMOCRATIC PARTY: THE BIGGEST LOSER

The European Council’s decision to postpone Serbia’s candidacy turned the Democratic Party and President Tadic the biggest losers of all. The party has once again mistakenly assessed that extradition of Ratko Mladic and cooperation with the ICTY would meet all the criteria for EU candidacy. By persisting on the “both Kosovo and EU” policy and staging a diplomatic campaign against recognition of Kosovo’s

<sup>6</sup> Danas, December 3-4, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

independence the party has made the Kosovo issue a focal point of the political scene. The upcoming elections further complicate the matters.

To justify himself President Tadic (the same as other members of the cabinet) told the general public new preconditions had been placed on Serbia (recognition of Kosovo), which Serbia could never accept.

“I am not disappointed,” he told the press in the aftermath of the decision from Brussels, adding that Serbia “cannot and shall not give up its European future” as there is no “valid alternative” to pro-European policy. “<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, he stressed, “The ‘both Kosovo and EU’ policy has not failed.” He said in this context that Serbia had been asked to give up Res. 1244, something “it could not and never would accept.”<sup>9</sup> “The decision to deny Serbia candidacy plays into the hands of the parties that would not want to see Serbia in EU but to take it back to 1990s,” he said bitterly.<sup>10</sup>

There are indications that the issue of responsibility for the failed candidacy is raised within the Democratic Party. According to analyst Vladimir Goati the latest developments at the DS Main Committee that leaked out could indicate a serious split in the party leadership.<sup>11</sup> At the meeting of the DS Main Committee Dragan Djilas, party vice-president, called Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic and Minister for Kosovo and Metohija Goran Bogdanovic to account for the failed candidacy.<sup>12</sup> Bozidar Djelic, vice-premier in charge of EU integration, resigned because of the failed candidacy. He was the first high official to resign in the past decade.

<sup>8</sup> Politika, December 10, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Politika, December 10, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> [www.B92.net](http://www.B92.net) 13. decembar 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

According to Rasim Raljic, a coalition partner, the room for Serbia’s candidacy in March 2012 is rather small. “A failed candidacy does mean that we should give up reforms and adoption of European laws. But we have to stop idealizing EU and representing it as a cure for all our wounds and problems. EU is not the only sense of life and action. Our attitude towards EU has to be rationalized. We must do everything in our power to accede it but cannot cross the red lines of our national policy in the process,” he said.<sup>13</sup>

Most politicians declared that Serbia would not accept EU’s request and recognize Kosovo. Jelko Kacin, special rapporteur for the Balkans, and Vensan Deger, head of EU Delegation to Serbia, responded promptly. “European Parliament knows nothing about EU having asked Serbia to recognize Kosovo. Not a single EU member-state could unilaterally request Serbia to do something like that,” said Deger.<sup>14</sup> He also denied that Kosovo’s recognition was a precondition for accession, saying, “That has never been a request, direct or indirect. Our policy is clear-cut and implies progress in the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo.”<sup>15</sup>

“Perhaps they don’t ask us to recognize Kosovo in a formal manner. But should we accept what they want us to do, that would not be far from a recognition,” said Ivica Dacic, police minister.<sup>16</sup>

Statements as such, particularly by governmental officials, are in the service of the election campaign already in full swing though the elections have not been called yet. Patriotic rhetoric will grow even more radical over the election campaign and insistence on “both

<sup>13</sup> [www.B92.net](http://www.B92.net) December 14, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

EU and Kosovo” will only further confuse the electorate.

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

In early November 2011 several parties, non-governmental organizations (the Helsinki Committee among them) and civil sector activists initiated a pro-European movement under the name *Preokret (Turnabout)*. Under the political umbrella of Liberal Democratic Party /LDP/, Social Democratic Union /SDU/ and Serbian Renewal Movement /SPO/ the movement has so far attracted thousands of citizens and outstanding figures.

This authentic movement assembles parts of the society asking for the first time ever a political turnabout and warning against the government’s calculation and vacillation. The manifesto titled “For Serbia in Europe and Europe in Serbia” quotes, “The actual regime is the most responsible for this confusion: its calculation and vacillation have seriously undermined the society’s pro-European orientation and vital interests depending on this course. Therefore, no one should expect us any more to be super-numeraries in the conflict against a European Serbia...Those at Serbia’s helm must take upon themselves the responsibility for the country’s European future.”<sup>17</sup>

Leaders of the three parties, Cedomir Jovanovic, Zarko Korac and Vuk Draskovic ask for a U-turn in the policy for Kosovo and recognition of the new reality in Kosovo (“Nonrecognition of Kosovo’s truth and reality cannot change that truth and that reality,” says the manifesto).

Immediately after the movement’s launch the three leaders asked President Tadic, on behalf of initial signatories, to adhere to the initiative

originating from the society and call upon Serbs in North Kosovo to withdraw from barricades. On the very day he received the appeal, November 6, President Tadic turned it down. When on November 29 he finally decided to call upon Kosovo Serbs to withdraw (under the excuse of their own safety) everything was too late.

In terms of the media, the initiative itself is marginalized. Both left-wing and right-wing criticism of the movement (Pecat, Nova Srpska Politicka Misao, Pescanik, E-Novine, etc.) actually calls for its boycott.

## THE END OF “BOTH KOSOVO AND EU” POLICY

After the Brussels debacle domestic public was unanimous that it marked the end of the “both Kosovo and EU” policy. Though their motives are different, representatives of two poles of Serbia’s public scene are in agreement about this.

On the one hand, Ognjen Pribicevic, former ambassador to Germany, holds that the postponed candidacy creates a new political situation in which “both EU and Kosovo” policy cannot sustain. Politicians are duty-bound, he says, to tell people which of the two they will choose the more so since 60-70 parties, i.e. 60 percent of the electorate, opt for Serbia’s European course.

On the other hand, Slobodan Antonic, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, call this “duplexity” unsustainable and advocates for popular vote about the “dilemma” or “choice” as the fairest solution. According to Dragamir Jankovic of the European Economic Institute persistence on the slogan “both Europe and Kosovo” leads towards “loss of both EU and Kosovo.” Djordje Vukadinovic, editor-in-chief of the *Nova Srpska*

<sup>17</sup> Manifesto, Turnabout

*Politicka Misao* (New Serbian Political Thought), takes that denied candidacy indicates the “no alternative to Europe” policy is at dead end. For him too, the “both Kosovo and EU” policy cannot sustain but the choice between EU and Kosovo is not a choice between two parities: “On the one hand we have our Constitutions and territorial integrity /Kosovo/, and, on the other, a shaky association /EU/,” he says.<sup>18</sup>

Dragan Bujosevic, editor-in-chief of *Politika*, says in his editorial, “The President simply has to stop repeating about both Kosovo and Europe as no one will understand him any more.”<sup>19</sup>

## A “SHOWDOWN” WITH EUROPE

Reactions to the postponed candidacy were mostly emotional. Almost all academicians and influential intellectuals, either pro – or anti-European, had their say about the matter (the later assembled around Pecat and Nova Srpska *Politicka Misao*).

As expected, Serbia’s Euroskeptics were accusing EU of blackmail, “new conditions,” humiliation, “siding with” Kosovo Albanians and excessive arrogance. “The attitude towards Serbia by administrations in Brussels and some most powerful EU member-states had been lordly and demanding for long,” says Djordje Vukadinovic.

“One should not hurry into such Europe,” warns Miodrag Ekmecic, academician and ideologist of the Bosnian war. “A journey to Europe is like a journey to the moon – once you get there we cannot wait to go back home,” say Ekmecic, adding, “In Serbia, only politicians

weep for Europe as they believe Europe would rebuild what they have destroyed at home.”<sup>20</sup>

In their arguments against EU many quote economic crisis and the crisis in euro zone. The message behind tons of newspaper stories was the one that Serbia should not lament a denied candidacy. Europe is overwhelmed with problems of its own and no longer cares for enlargement, run frequent arguments. According to many analysts, Europe is tired of integration of poor East European societies, integration of poor immigrants into rich societies, saving big debtors among its own ranks, saving their loaners and saving euro.<sup>21</sup> Miroslav Lazanski, military analyst, says, “Today’s Europe is in a dilemma about the course to take: it is faced with constitutional crisis, a budget crisis, a crisis of euro, the longstanding crisis about Turkey, the latest Greek and Italian crises, sclerotic national economies and record-breaking unemployment...The German-French engine cannot cope for long with the growingly heavy shell. While these two countries try their best to save what can be saved, their own institutional crisis grows deeper and deeper.”<sup>22</sup>

Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic said that enlargement was not on EU’s top priority list due to the crisis within it. It will not be a disaster if Serbia fails to obtain EU candidacy on December 9, he said, adding, and “December 9 has been dramatized at home without a good reason.”<sup>23</sup>

In the past four months the Serb Orthodox Church /SPC/ has openly side with the anti-European bloc. In Kosovska Mitrovica Patriarch Irinej declared that Kosovo “should be defended with life itself if necessary.” In a release issued after negotiators, Stefanovic and Tahiri,

20 Vecernje Novosti, December 4, 2011.

21 Politika, November 1, 2011.

22 Politika, November 12, 2011.

23 Blic, November 18, 2011.

18 TV B92, December 9, 2011.

19 Politika, December 10, 2011.

reached an agreement on integrated control of Jarinje and Brnjak border crossings, SPC Synod appealed to the President of the Republic and the government “not to abandon the people of Old Serbia<sup>24</sup> for the sake of Chimera known as EU candidacy.” “For, the only alternative for a responsible government and political elite are Serbia and Serb people as a whole. There is an alternative to everything else, including the idealized and mythologized European Union,” concludes the release. “<sup>25</sup> Further, for SPC dignitaries “This union /EU/ is already in a deep crisis threatening to disintegrate it. The more so giving up Kosovo and Metohija should not be a membership fee.” And this is the point of SPC release despite one paragraph is which it asks Serbs in Kosovo’s north to “to obey the legal and democratically elected administration in Belgrade.”<sup>26</sup>

## RESISTANCE BY POLITICAL PARTIES

Reactions by individual parties were predictable. Except for LDP, opposition parties are growingly suspicious about EU’s plans vis-à-vis Serbia’s accession.

Vojislav Kostunica’s Democratic Party of Serbia /DSS/ is a pivot of the anti-European bloc. In this context, its opposition to the phrase “there is no alternative to Europe” has been the most consequent and commitment to strategic partnership with Russia the strongest. DSS wanted to proclaim EULEX unwelcome and have the Kosovo issue back on the UN SC agenda. Kostunica holds that Serbia “lost nothing” by denied candidacy and demands “a comprehensive public debate” on “membership of EU being or not being in Serbia’s interest.”<sup>27</sup> “Membership of EU would be more economically detrimen-

tal than beneficial to Serbia,” he says, adding, “Disowned Kosovo and Metohija would be our membership fee for EU.”<sup>28</sup>

Kostunica was the one to suggest Serbia’s “military, political and economic neutrality” as a way out of the present crisis. He takes that the Kosovo conflict should be frozen. “We can only be saved if we abide by the law and never recognize Kosovo’s independence. We must keep saying openly and proving that Kosovo belongs to us. These would be the elements of a frozen or unresolved conflict to be left to some future generations to cope with,” he says.<sup>29</sup>

Cedomir Jovanovic, LDP leader, also takes that the present regime has “suffered defeat.” “The government must take upon itself the blame for having taken Serbia to a blind alley and immediately change its policy,” says Jovanovic, adding, “Citizens, Slobodan Milosevic, Germany or Europe are not to blame for this dead end but the ruling coalition, that is the people who have formulated a foredoomed policy.”<sup>30</sup> Vuk Draskovic is somewhat more optimistic – for him Brussels has given Serbia a warning for its “unrealistic red lines and losing policy in Kosovo.” “Serbia has passed all exams except the one in good manners. It will be given a second chance in March,” says Draskovic.<sup>31</sup>

Having expressed his regret for the failed candidacy, Tomislav Nikolic called “the incapable government” to account and called for the Premier’s resignation, dismissal of the parliament and early elections. “Probably Europe doesn’t want us at all,” he said at some point.<sup>32</sup>

Vladislav Jovanovic, foreign minister in Milosevic’s era, shares Kostunica’s views. As

28 Vecernje Novosti, November 24, 2011.

29 Politika, December 6, 2011.

30 Ibid.

31 TV B92, December 10, 2011.

32 Ibid.

24 Archaic name for Kosovo and Metohija

25 Vreme, December 8, 2011.

26 Ibid.

27 Politika, December 10, 2011.

preventing Kosovo's independence was impossible, he says, "we should have kept our international right to the territory and thus retained the right to revanche to be exercised in foreseeable future," argues Jovanovic.<sup>33</sup>

The Serb Radical Party /SRS/ has not only been against the candidacy but has also openly supported the "log revolution" by Kosovo Serbs. When President Tadic called upon Serbs to remove barricades, Todorovic, SRS high official, messaged them to sustain and "only trust in themselves, in the Lord and Russia."<sup>34</sup>

Velimir Ilic, leader of New Serbia /NS/, who is generally not against Serbia's movement towards EU, takes that EU would not have Serbia in its ranks. "I speak up for Europe and Serbia's membership. But, see, Europe is in serious crisis. It is not after enlargement, let alone after having us to provide for."<sup>35</sup>

## SERBS IN NORTH KOSOVO

Political leaders of four Serb municipalities in Kosovo's north were on barricades when the European Council decided to postpone Serbia's candidacy.

The first splits between Kosovo Serb political leaders and Belgrade authorities, including the President of the Republic, appeared back in October 2011. Minister for Kosovo and Metohija Goran Bogdanovic accused these leaders of duplicity: the views they expressed at the meeting with the President of the Republic were not the same they addressed the press with. Belgrade's initial enthusiasm for the barricades at the two border crossings (fueled by the media) dwindled the moment the European Commission recommended candidacy for Serbia (October

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

12). It became evident that relations between Kosovo Serb leaders and Belgrade's negotiator in the dialogue with Pristina, Borislav Stefanovic, were seriously disturbed.

Kosovo Serbs' petitioning for citizenship of Russia also manifested their distrust of Belgrade. The petition with 20,000 signatures was handed over to Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Konuzin.<sup>36</sup> Dmitry Rogozin of the Russian Duma was the only Russian official to welcome the petition – what he offered was a collective move to Russia from "Kosovo-Albanian prison." "We have many abandoned villages and towns, we have vast territories to be settled. So, can we not afford another 20,000 people, can't we, we can give them our citizenship and include them in the repatriation program rather than the immigration one," he said.<sup>37</sup> The whole story ended when President Dmitry Medvedev himself announced that under the Russian law Kosovo Serbs were not entitled to citizenship but can count on support and humanitarian aid.<sup>38</sup>

Independence declaration for four Serb municipalities was among short-lived ideas. Administrator of the Kosovo-Mitrovica district and advocate of such an "autonomous territory," Radenko Nedeljkovic, said, "This will become true if the three-month terror against Serb persists."<sup>39</sup>

Minister of the Interior Ivica Dacic openly supported these radical stands. "Who can deny them this right? Why have they acknowledged

36 The initiative itself was launched by the Russian Embassy seeking to demonstrate that Kosovo Serbs did not trust President Tadic.

37 Politika, November 17, 2011.

38 Russia's convoy of humanitarian aid included tents and camping equipment.

39 Politika, November 21, 2011.

the same right to Albanians refusing to live in the Republic of Serbia?" commented Dacic.<sup>40</sup>

Instrumentalization of Kosovo Serbs associates the developments in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Except for LDP, some minor parties and a part of the civil sector the entire Serb elite was behind it. And there is also Russia – formally, it is not against Serbia's membership

40 Ibid.

of EU (NATO stands for Russia's "red line") but holds presence in the region is a major strategic concern.

Machinery for maintenance and four-months rebuilding of barricades costs dear. It is hard to believe that just "local businessmen" have provided all these huge funds.

## SUMMARY

The postponed candidacy is the Democratic Party's debacle notwithstanding all the pressure under which it probably acted. Though a political pivot the Democratic Party manifested absence of leadership and incapability to make a political U-turn for the benefit of Serbia's devastated society and economy.

Commenting the postponed candidacy Serbia's political and intellectual elite used predictable arguments none of which were looking to the future. Serbia's future cannot be charted unless the situation in it is diagnosed.

Instead of accepting the reality the political elite was caught in the trap of self-pity and parochialism. As long as the elite role-plays a victim and claims "the truth" Serbia will not find a way out of the present crisis and constructively work for its own benefit and that of the region.

Unless it recognizes that the national policy has been defeated and defines a new one, Serbia will continue sinking into general confusion and social disintegration.

Serbia's policy for EU and Kosovo has come to a dead end. EU candidacy depends on the dialogue with Pristina, while continuation of negotiations on a solution for Kosovo's participation in international forums. Pacification of Kosovo Serbs in the North and implementation of the agreements reached in Brussels till March 2012 are now huge challenges to the government. A political U-turn would secure the Democratic Party better chances in the upcoming elections.

Today, most politicians (including cabinet members) predict that Serbia would not obtain candidacy in late February or early March 2012. This implies that they are not ready for radical changes and that the Kosovo issue will dominate the upcoming election campaign.

In parallel with actions to secure it a candidacy, Serbia should be more constructive in the region and chart its future through joint regional projects, starting from a common market. Changes in Croatia are of major importance in this context: they open the door to a more intensive cooperation and settlement of open questions (missing persons, cultural heritage, property, etc.).

Should it change its policy Serbia would gain credit in the region and as such could play a crucial role in its stabilization, especially in consolidation of the states of Kosovo and Bosnia.