

The political situation in Serbia is both unprecedented and unexpected. No analyst had predicted, three or four months ago, that the election on May 11 would result in such impressive gains by the Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka, DS)—which won over 38 percent of the vote—and in a relative defeat for the Radicals (Srpska radikalna stranka, SRS), which polled 29 percent. The most surprising feature of Serbia's post-election scene is the formation of the new governing coalition, based on an alliance between the "pro-Western, reformist" Democrats and the Socialists (Socijalisticka partija Srbije, SPS), the party of the late President Slobodan Milosevic.

For the past almost eight years since the fall of Milosevic, the Democrats and their allies have been demonizing the Socialist Party as an ugly relic of the past, the party that provided the political backbone to Milosevic and his regime, the obedient mechanism for all of his misguided and possibly criminal policies in the 1990s. One of the members of the present DS-led coalition, a separatist from Vojvodina by the name of Nenad Canak, has even advocated a formal ban on the Socialist Party.

But the Democrats have made a complete U-turn since May 11, having realized that they need the Socialists—who together with their smaller allies have 20 deputies—in order to stay in power. Over the past six weeks some extensive horse-trading followed that realization. Legitimizing the Socialists, proclaiming them to be a modern, decent, pro-European center-left party, fit for membership in the Socialist International, is merely one part of the package offered by the DS. Overall, the coalition agreement is the fruit of a massive exercise in political corruption, the like of which has never been seen in Serbia's long and turbulent history.

TYCOONS AND DIPLOMATS—The ability of the Democratic Party to come on top is nevertheless difficult to explain unless we consider the impact of an important pressure group helping the DS. This group's influence was not unknown, but it had never before pulled the strings so blatantly. It is the oligarchy. Now at last we know the full extent to which Belgrade's leading tycoons—their fortunes often harking back to the days of Milosevic—control the political scene from the shadows. About a dozen men who hold all key levers of financial and economic

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power in the country are overwhelmingly supportive of Tadic's Democrats. They are well aware that under the Yellow-Red Coalition (DS-SPS) their lucrative practices will continue unhindered. On the other hand, they were scared stiff of the Radicals, because the SRS had made the struggle against corruption a key element of its election campaign. In addition, the Radicals have amassed a lot of compromising information about some key oligarchs and their political associates in the DS camp, and they were determined to pursue prosecutions if they came to power. Knowing this, the tycoons had an additional motive to contribute lavishly to a clandestine slush fund that the DS used to woo Ivica Dacic, the Socialists leader, and his junior partners. Tadic's emissaries have done their work on the Socialist Party Main Board so thoroughly, that even this bulwark of Milosevic's reliable cadres from the 1990s overwhelmingly voted to support the coalition of their party with the DS.

While the exact magnitude of illicit transactions is unknown for the time being, Belgrade is a relatively small place in which nothing political remains unknown for long. In Serbia's politics, where there's smoke, there's fire. It is also noteworthy that the oligarchs enjoy the support of some Western diplomats in Belgrade—specifically the U.S. and British Ambassadors—in their self-appropriated role of king-makers, which provides a vivid example of the EU-NATO support for democracy in the Balkans.

COMMIES OLD AND NEW—That so many old Milosevic loyalists, who presumably have good reasons to despise and dislike Tadic's people, have changed their minds so swiftly, is a sad testimony to the condition of a shattered nation. The SPS U-turn does not concern the legacy of Milosevic alone. Having profiled themselves for years as a patriotic force determined to defend Serbia's rights in Kosovo come what may, the Socialists are about to join forces with the party obviously reconciled to giving up on Serbia's southern province after some decent interval, while pretending all along not to be doing so.

The readiness to treat vital national interests as disposable commodities indicates that the DS-SPS tandem is less surprising than it looks. The differences between the new partners may not be so deep after all. The leading lights of both parties have their ideological roots in the old, long-defunct League of Communists of Yugoslavia. A cynic would say that we are witnessing the creation of a coalition between Serbia's "reformist" communists—such as Dragoljub Micunovic—who have morphed into Tadic's Europhile social-democrats, and some seriously hard-line doctrinaires—such as Milutin Mrkonjic—who still remain faithful to Milosevic's legacy. It has been noted that we are now witnessing the coalition of two opposite factions from the Eight Session of the Communist party of Serbia in September 1987, which propelled Milosevic to power. The reformist, social-democratic wing was defeated at that time, while Milosevic's wing was triumphant. Over the past eight years the roles have been reversed. After an estrangement lasting two decades, the two factions are coming back together again.

Some Serbian patriots console themselves with the view that this coalition cannot last for long.

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They are wrong: this coalition is likely to stay in power longer than its predecessors because its partners will have no motive to rock the boat. The Socialists have obtained the best deal they could hope for, and they have an incentive to maintain the new status quo as long as possible. Their leader Ivica Dacic probably realizes that the party will disappear from the political scene at the next election: SPS rank-and-file will never forgive him the deal with Tadic, and this is the one shot at power, money and influence that he will ever have.

The Democrats cannot afford to risk another election, because they have reached the zenith of their likely electoral success, with just under forty percent of the vote and over a hundred deputies. They are loath to risk their current dominant position, especially if the country's financial and economic situation starts to unravel. Serbia is effectively bankrupt. It owes over \$20 billion to foreign creditors, but in spite of heavy borrowing the neoliberals who run the show have not succeeded in quick-starting the economy. Public spending in particular is not supported by the economy. After the final round of privatization, public spending may have to be financed either by inflationary means, or else by a new round of borrowing.

OPPOSITION IN CRISIS—On the other hand, the opposition to the DS-led government has to devise a long-term strategy which it does not have at the moment. In the short term it will be hard for the leading opposition parties, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), to come up with a program of action that could undermine the emerging coalition. The DSS of the outgoing Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica is entering a period of decline. It is having difficulty in retaining loyalty of any significant segment of the electorate. Having failed on two important occasions (after the elections of December of 2004 and January of 2007) to put together stable coalitions, it is paying the price of joining forces with the DS last year. The ensuing tensions and almost schizoid bipolarity between Tadic's Europhiles and Kostunica's moderate patriots have harmed the latter disproportionately. The latter is now paying the price of not entering a coalition with the Radical Party when he could do so from the position of strength.

The Radicals also are entering a period of crisis. For many years they have been building up their support and developing their base, in the confident expectation that the ruling parties' failures over Kosovo will work to their advantage. This is not the case, however. The Democrats have succeeded in presenting Kosovo as fait accompli to the Serbian public, and they keep pointing at some elusive "European integrations" as a substitute. The Radicals, on the other hand, have failed to articulate a message that is both correct and inspiring. The Serbs are tired of economic deprivation, and many of them are willing to be duped with Euro-talk. They are still listening to the rosy stories of the open EU path, which with the defeat of the Lisbon Treaty at the Irish referendum is in fact closed. There will be no enlargement of the EU for a many years to come.

SERBIA AND THE E.U.—Serbia's Euro-fanatics, led by President Boris Tadic, will admit no such thing, however. In an interview on June 29, Tadic stated two priorities of the new government: to ratify the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU as soon as possible, and to "complete" cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. But Tadic's haste makes no sense. Even if the Serbian Assembly ratifies it, that gesture will be meaningless. The EU has already decided that the Agreement is suspended until General Mladic and Dr. Karadzic are

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arrested and delivered to the Hague Tribunal—and that will not happen. Had the Serbian government had the wherewithal to deliver them, it would have done so long time ago. Even if the Serbian Assembly ratifies the SAA, it will remain inoperative for as long as Brussels remains unconvinced that Serbia has fully complied with its imposed obligation to cooperate with The Hague Tribunal—and yet such compliance is impossible for as long as Karadzic and Mladic are at large; it's a classic Catch 22. In addition, even if the SAA were to become operative, it would not mean that Serbia is any closer to joining the EU. With the outcome of the Irish referendum the Lisbon Treaty is effectively dead. The Treaty, had it passed, would have provided the mechanism for further enlargement. Now the EU has to fall back on the Nice Treaty, signed in December 2000, that came into force in February 2003. It specifically limits the size of the EU to 28 members, which means that Croatia may be admitted next year, and that's the end: after that, for maybe 10 to 15 years the enlargement process will be over. It is interesting, however, that in Serbia nobody seems to be willing to spell this simple fact aloud. The enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn keeps saying that the door is still open to new members, but he is not telling the truth. He is paid to say so. In reality, in Brussels the EU bureaucrats are knowingly nodding to each other that it is over: neither Serbia, nor Macedonia, nor Bosnia-Herzegovina, let alone Turkey, will be members of the EU for at least two decades.

AS FOR KOSOVO...—Commenting on possible replacement of UNMIK by EULEX in Kosovo, Tadic repeated on June 29 that no transformation of UN's mission would be acceptable based on the initiative of the UN Secretary General alone, and that a Security Council decision would be needed. His statement was apparently calculated to prepare the ground for Serbia's gradual admission that Kosovo is a lost cause. Tadic pretends to resist such outcome, but in practice he is not taking any steps that would make the position of the secessionists more difficult. Belgrade's trade with Kosovo continues unabated, Kosovo Albanians' transit through the territory of Serbia is unhindered, Serbian electricity keeps Kosovo's derelict grid functioning. Tadic seems to be implying that Serbia will accept the EU's EULEX mission, illegal as it is, provided it gets a fig leaf of legality from the UN Security Council. At the UN SC the only barrier is the opposition of Russia. Russia is not going to continue opposing Western policies, however, if Serbia herself is reconciled to the loss of the southern province. We are already witnessing gradual distancing of the Russian diplomacy from the Kosovo issue. It is only a matter of time till the new government in Belgrade signals to Moscow that Serbia is perfectly willing to see Russia removing its objections to the transformation of the UN mission into an EU mission. If and when that happens, it will mark de facto acceptance of Kosovo's independence by Belgrade.

The chief losers, in the short term, will be the remaining Serbs of Kosovo. Their lot is fatally dependent upon the posture of the government in Belgrade, politically, financially, and morally. Their ability to resist forced integration into an independent Kosovo is dependent on what happens in the Serbian capital. With the new coalition, they can no longer count on any serious support from Belgrade and most certainly they can no longer take it for granted. The previous

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coalition had an important ministry, the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, which was ably handled by the Democratic Party of Serbia and one of its leading lights, Prof. Slobodan Samardzic, as Minister. They were able to devise a whole series of projects that helped the Serbian community in Kosovo feel that it is not abandoned and that its members can count on support from Belgrade. With the new government this will no longer be the case.

It is tempting to conclude that Serbia will have an unpatriotic government for the next few years. This conclusion depends on one's definition of "patriotism," of course, and Tadic would claim that his striving to join "Europe" at any price—Kosovo implicitly included—is somehow "patriotic." Tadic's and his cohorts' understanding of Serbdom means turning Serbia into just another post-modern European nation that has given up on the legacy of its culture, tradition, and faith, just another nation that measures its successes solely in terms of dollars or euros per capita.