



Milan Pajević Interview for Dnevnik 30.08.2009.

Milan Pajević, Chairman of the ISAC Fund Advisory Board, on Serbia's foreign policy moves

"Serbia's foreign policy strategy schizophrenically fluctuates between the West and the East, but in the long term it is determined to fail as Serbia no longer has the same geo-political importance like the former Yugoslavia," states the analysis of the private American intelligence agency "Stratfor". According to the author, Belgrade's intention to revive its Cold War political orientation, establishing itself as the main bridge between the East and West, is best represented by the visit to China by President Boris Tadić, and Belgrade's offer to be the host for the Non-Aligned Movement's 50th anniversary in 2011.

Milan Pajević, the Chairman of the ISAC Fund Advisory Board, and one of the most informed experts in these matters, offered his thoughts to "Dnevnik" on the foreign policy steps which Belgrade is taking, and the overall foreign policy of Serbia.

"We can not talk about the existence of a strategic foreign policy concept in Serbia while its principles, goals and especially its priorities are not written down either in the constitution or in an appropriate law. Not even to mention that none such document has passed the National Assembly or been mentioned in any Parliamentarian Act. Therefore, we can not talk about a serious foreign policy while it is not lawfully defined, so that it's goals and priorities can remain the same when there is a change in government. That way the constant change of policy, even when a new government comes to power, would be avoided as would bring new surprises to our citizens and our partners in the international community. What we in everyday terms call foreign policy is generally meant for public consumption and scoring short term political points," says Milan Pajević.

Can the strategic partnership with Russia and China be a problem towards our road to the EU?

"There is no way can we speak about a strategic partnership between Serbia and those countries who are ten times or a hundred times larger than Serbia and which are different in every way, with strategic goals and interests pointed in a completely different direction.. But if we are already talking about Serbia's real strategic orientation, then it can only be directed towards the EU and our neighbouring countries with which we share the fate of the entire South Eastern European region. Of course it is very important to develop and foster cooperation with Russia and China, but "bombastic" words shouldn't be used for creating unrealistic expectations of our citizens. For example, in the last nine years alone, not even to mention during the Milosevic era, there were dozens of state visits to China on the highest level, and they never achieved any satisfactory results. That is why I believe it is more reasonable for something concretely first to occur, and then advertise its success.

Do the partnerships with the states which matter in the international arena empower Serbia's position?

"That will be seen after a certain period of time. With a period of one, two or three years we will see in which direction these bilateral relations develop. We will see what are the concrete results and what benefits are created for our country. Of course that sort of cooperation is required and welcomed, and it needs to be expanded, but it needs to be understood that such cooperation is in the form of classic bilateral relations, which is something different than Serbia's strategic goal - the complete transformation and integration into the system of the EU. These two things should not be mixed.

Here there is often talk about being the bridge between the East and the West – first we were the bridge between Russia and the EU and now we can include and China?

"Those are humours and ridicules statements, which show a complete misunderstanding of relations in the contemporary world, the place and status of Serbia and the time in which we live in. Neither China nor Russia require Serbia, or any other country for that matter, to be their bridge or middle man with the EU. It is already known that there is direct cooperation in various forms between those two countries and the EU, which, for example can be illustrated by the fact that trade between the EU and China in 2008 reached 325 billion euros!"

Brussels has delayed the expansion of the Union for an unspecified amount of time?

"First of all, Brussels has not indefinitely postponed the acceptance of new members, rather the economic and institutional crises, as well as the European elections, have put that issue on the side for this year. The further expansion of the Union will be regulated once the Lisbon treaty comes into force. However, nothing which is occurring in the EU during 2009, and the fact is that the EU is dealing with large inner issues, has any direct impact, nor does it prevent Serbia or any other country in the region to continue with reforms which lead towards the EU. We are very far from being qualified to become a member of the EU, let alone talk about the fact that the EU is not ready to accept us. Nothing prevents us on our road of reform towards the EU, except our own inner disorganization and disorder. So, our main focus should be diverted from Brussels to Serbia!

How is the European reform process progressing here?

It is completely clear that the process is lacking and inconsistent. There is not enough resolve, nor enough attention being directed to carry out reforms, particularly the ones which get us closer to the EU, especially in the fields which interest the citizens the most, such as the judiciary and all executive bodies, improving the business and investment climate, the fight against organized crime, environmental protection... We frequently forget that the interests and expectations of Serbia's citizens is identically to what the EU requires of us, and it is the responsibility of the political establishment and the whole administration to meet those expectations and requirements in the fastest way possible. Too much time has already been lost. For example, instead of three or

four years, it took us eight years to sign the SAA, which isn't even in force due to The Hague obligations. Our limited resources should be used more productively for things which bring more benefits in the long run. It would be much better to invest more energy, in say trying to convince the main decision makers in Holland, which is key for the ratification of the SAA, then in spending time, money and power on relations with some non-aligned members.

What is the opinion of Brussels when it comes to Serbia?

Generally speaking, nothing spectacular. We are not very often on the agenda of various EU organs, as we seem to think we are, except of course for those few individuals who are in charge of EU enlargement within the European Commission who deal with the Western Balkans. In October, we are going to receive the yearly report in regards to Serbia's progress, and then we will see exactly what Brussels "thinks" about us, our current situation and the fulfilment of our "homework" in terms of European integrations.

D. Milivojević