

Transcript

ISAC PANEL DISCUSSION:

“REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE – THE DAY AFTER”

22 May 2006

(at Mediacenter, Belgrade)

Pavle Janković: The reason for organising this conference is the result of the referendum on independence in Montenegro. By now, the results are clear. The citizens of Montenegro have voted for independence by an overwhelming majority. This means that the Republic of Serbia is an independent state as of last night. More on this and on how the new situation could influence, or should influence the relations of the two new states and on our future in Euro Atlantic integrations, particularly the accession to the European Union, you will hear from Mr. Patrick Rock and Ms. Milica Delevic Djilas. Mr. Rock, please, the floor is yours.

Patrick Rock: Thank you indeed very much for that introduction. I think yesterday's results demonstrated that God is Serbian, because a result of just under 55% would have been disastrous for Serbia and for Montenegro and for the EU and for the region. I am very pleased to see that a very clear decision has been made, and that was most important about yesterday. A very clear decision, 11% margin, which in most European countries would be a landslide, not a narrow result, but a landslide. And it is better for Serbia in all sorts of ways. I've observed the common state for the last 3 years, most of that time working in Brussels trying to make it work. The basis of that common state was two equal republics with equal rights. That wasn't necessarily very satisfactory from Serbia's point of view, because it was so much bigger, but that was the basis of the constitutional Charter. That means that if one state is not happy with the arrangement it's just not going to work. You can't have Brussels coming there week after week, month after month to sort out the difficulties. You have to have good will operating in both republics in equal measure, and that was never the case with the State Union. The result of that was that Serbia's European integration prospects were badly damaged. I am quite sure you lost a lot of time that you could have used more profitably moving closer towards the EU. So, far from being the fastest road to EU, it was a blockage on the road to Europe and I am glad it has been moved off the line because I think that Serbia can do a lot better. Now, after all these fights, all these wars, all these difficulties, in the last 20 years, 15 years or whatever, you've got your own country back. And you got it back in a strange way – somebody else has had a referendum and suddenly Serbia is a country again. So, it would be natural perhaps to be a little bit confused, a little bit anxious about that situation. But I hope you'll be positive and confident about your Serbian future, because I am absolutely confident and positive about your ability and capacity to manage that future profitably for the good of your people.

You've now got an early test of how you are going to perform as a new and independent country – and that is your relations with Montenegro. There are two ways of approaching this: one is with some degree of bitterness and backward looking and having these talks that must now take place very quickly in an atmosphere of bitterness and rancour. The second way is the Serbian way: your national tradition of hospitality, of good neighbourliness, of friendship and generosity, and openness, and tolerance that you will show to your neighbours and friends in Montenegro. There were some things said in the campaign that should not have been said – about students in Serbia, about hospital patients, about people working in Serbia, about visas – this was all nonsense. I am quite sure that there will be no visas on the border with Serbia. There will be no visas because Serbians do not want visas. They want to visit their friends and relatives and go for holidays to their places they've been to year after year. And there will be, I am sure, generous and sensible treatment for students from both countries going to study and for hospital patients. These things can be worked out. The Montenegrin authorities offered Serbian citizens living in Montenegro all the rights of citizenship except the right to vote. And I hope as a minimum, Serbia will offer the same. But actually, I was reminded by Pavle, that in the split with Czechoslovakia, the Czechs offered Slovak citizens living in Czech Republic the opportunity to become citizens if they wanted to. And that seems to me quite a good idea, both for Serbia and for Montenegro. Because the irony is that during this period of the common state, relations between Serbia and Montenegro have never been so bad. You know, you even had the situation with the Eurovision song contest where people were pelted off the stage. Things have become so bad. And I think within a period of a couple of years things will be miles better in terms of the relationship because actually the irritant – that is trying to make this common state work – would have gone. And I think you will find your relations with Montenegro far, far better.

Now to turn to the EU integration consequences. You will inherit, effectively, the negotiating mandate from Serbia and Montenegro, with some changes, but basically as the inheriting state, the successor state, you inherit that negotiating mandate. That is a very simple process that can be done very quickly. So, the path to having an SAA is very simple now, save, unfortunately, for one other issue which has nothing to do with the Montenegrin referendum. That is how you would move forward, and then, eventually, you would make an application for membership; you would have your own accession negotiations, your own entry date; you would essentially have two totally separate tracks for Serbia and Montenegro from now on. You won't affect each other – if one side doesn't do what it should the other doesn't get punished or whatever; you are on your own as an independent country moving towards Europe. That is the consequence of what has happened yesterday.

Now, can I mention just a bit more about the EU integration. There had been two referendums as you know – in Holland and in France – which were negative for the constitution, and many people said that the reason was concern about enlargement. There had been 10 new countries, there was talk of Turkey joining, and people thought: "Well we've had enough; it's too much in the short term". And, France has put forward a non-paper for discussion quite soon recommending that the people's will should be taken into account in future enlargements and they themselves have promised a referendum and, I think, Austria too. I do not think, for one minute, that Serbia's European future is threatened. I am absolutely certain that the Thessalonica promise

that was made remains fully intact, and, therefore, the point being that Europe wants Serbia. But, Serbia has got to prove that Serbia wants Europe. And, it is very important to understand that in this new climate of enlargement there is going to be much more emphasis on conditions being met before you move from one stage to the other. Political conditions like The Hague but also technical conditions, like harmonisation, what is called the Acquis – that is the established body of law in the European Union. It is not going to be possible to lobby your way around this problem, spin your way out of this difficulty, these conditions have to be met. I think it is important to understand that. The United Kingdom had to meet all the conditions, including the common fisheries policy – which we hated, when we joined. And I am afraid Serbia will be in the same position.

Now on The Hague, very briefly, what is blocking your path on the SAA talks and in particular Ratko Mladic who is no one's hero, let's be honest, and deserves to face justice in The Hague. I would just make one observation. It is not for me to tell you how to catch him. I do not know where he is and I am not in a position to help you there. But I can tell you that your relationship with The Hague is extremely important. And that relationship is bad at the moment, at the operational, working level – that is those people responsible to catch general Mladic and those people in The Hague who are responsible for the same area – that relationship of trust is not there, there is no trust. And that is, I am afraid, because different signals have been sent over the last two or three months. At the beginning of March, I know that someone responsible, not a politician, but someone responsible for the search for Mladic, told The Hague that the Mladic case was not a priority. And that effectively meant that the EU integration was not a priority. And that is not the policy of the government as I understand it, so it was an extraordinary thing to say. At the end of the month, when it looked as though the talks would break down and there would be no talks, it was said that the authorities had known where he was two weeks before. In other words, they were very, very close behind him and expected to catch him at any moment. And then at the end of April, they told The Hague that they had lost track of him, from where he was last November, they completely changed the position. Now, I just say that serious partners don't behave like that. That is not acceptable. These were not politicians, these were the people at the operational level. But that has to change. I think someone has to come into that job with responsibility for the hunt for Mladic, if nothing else, who has the confidence of the Prime Minister, understands the intelligence services – so he is fully informed and so on, and understands also that his job is to gain the respect and the confidence of the Tribunal and keep it. Just as Rasim Ljajic has done. Who, by the way, is totally trusted by the Tribunal, and that – I think – would be a great breakthrough that would help ease the path to the resumption of talks.

One brief word on Kosovo. You are the inheritor state so your claim to Kosovo obviously remains. Under 1244 your government will maintain it. The referendum decision from yesterday has absolutely no influence whatever on the Kosovo's final decision. There is zero impact, I can assure you, on that decision. And anyone who tells you otherwise is not telling you the truth. It has not reduced your chances or increased your chances of retaining sovereignty in Kosovo. But, what I think is unhelpful, is some people who say – one of them an American who said – you got to choose between Kosovo and Europe. I do not like that sort of aggressive sort of linkage. What the international community expects from Serbia, as it expects from the Kosovo Albanians, is that you would engage

constructively in the discussions on Kosovo's final status, and indeed the other issues that involve Kosovo in the year to come. And, of course, if there is no agreement than Mr. Ahtisari would have to make some recommendations in due course, and then we will have to see whether the Contact Group and ultimately the Security Council agree with those recommendations. If there is agreement, of course, we are in a different situation. So that on Kosovo. Just finally; this is a moment of political choice in Serbia now, because the government has to be reshuffled. There are three ministers on the federal side who no longer will be operating at the federal level: Mr. Rasim Ljajic, Mr. Zoran Stankovic and Mr. Vuk Draskovic. So these three ministries have to be incorporated into government structures in Serbia, and therefore there is a political decision to be made now about which way to go. And, I would simply say this to Serbia – interfering as I always do – there is a real risk now, if the democratic forces don't get their act together, of a radical victory at the next election with SPS support. If you look at the polls, that is entirely possible. And I sometimes think, when democratic parties punch each other that they think: "Oh well, I can go up, they will go down; the total number of votes stays the same". That is not the case. If we spend the next few months, a year – or whatever it is till the next election, with democratic forces fighting each other, then the turnout will not be at the Montenegrin levels – I can assure you of that. It will be a lot lower than that and the people who will not vote are democratic voters who are fairly fed up that their vote, their politicians are not prepared to act responsibly in the national interest, as they say. They simply won't vote. And a radical victory will not lead to war, that's true. There won't be another war – they are not going to invade Croatia or recapture Kosovo, or whatever. That is not going to happen. But the international reputation of this country will be trashed – you'll be half way to Belarus. That's not an exaggeration. There'd be no inward investment, no chance of a European integration, complete isolation, dreadful relations with your neighbours – with Croatia, with Albania, and so on. It would be a catastrophe for this country. And it is in the national interest that the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Serbia engage in talks and bring those talks to a successful conclusion as soon as possible. Now I know that the Prime Minister is a Serbian patriot and he stood up to Milosevic all those years ago, and we are all very grateful he did. And I know that President Tadic is a Serbian patriot because he's proved it bravely as Minister of Defence and thereafter standing against the radicals for President. And they, I am sure, understand that their national obligation now is to engage in serious discussions. But let me put a self-interested case anyway: if the government staggers on from vote to vote trying to get one MP here, one MP there, they are not going to do well at the next election. It is not in the self-interest of the government to continue like that. It is better for them to have a proper relationship of some kind with the Democratic Party. And, as I've said, for the Democratic Party, if there are fights and splits – they are not going to benefit either, because people will not vote in the numbers required to make possible a new democratic government. So, it is not actually in the self-interest of either of the two parties not to engage, not to agree, but to go forward in a more purposive way. So, I very much hope that this happens, and I very much hope – therefore – that we can also move forward on the European front to a time, perhaps next year, when Serbia makes its independent application for membership and can really start to see the lights of Brussels ahead of it. Thank you.

Pavle Jankovic: Thank you Mr. Rock for these very important comments and remarks on putting in perspective the results of yesterday's referendum and also sending a message of how we should be thinking about our future – and particularly so in the democratic block.

End of part one.