



## ***Defining the Anti-reformers, Redefining the Reformers***

***Who in Serbia, at the end of the day, suffers the most from the overblown confrontations with the international community? To whose detriment is the senseless and tough rhetoric that has been suffocating Serbia's political life, with an abundance of statements such as "if Kosovo is seized, we will stop the negotiations with the EU", or "NATO is creating a »NATO state« in Kosovo"...?!***

If not the retrograde forces in Serbia and their current dishonest ally, who else stands to benefit in case that Kosovo status becomes a divisive issue in Europe? Serbia's heedless playing with a dangerous scenario is entering its final phase. Prime Minister Kostunica's recent statement that the one onto whom harm was inflicted must respond by inflicting harm in return, clearly defines the plan of action in the coming period. Such political (mis)calculation, however, overlooks the very palpable certainty that Serbia is the only undisputed loser in such a contest. The memory of the 1990s has evidently faded for those at the political top eager for a yet another madness. Senior officials emphatically compete in issuing statements that contradict Serbia's core developmental interests; moreover, they do not even hesitate to create a schizophrenic situation. A recent example: during the Foreign Affairs Minister Jeremic's visit to NATO Headquarters and the official hand-over of Serbia's Presentation Document in early September, a semi-official anti-NATO campaign was simultaneously enkindled at home, in which – among other things – even the PM's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) called for the Parliament to adopt a resolution ruling out Serbia's membership in the Alliance.

As NATO is neither the supreme authority on the Kosovo status, nor is Serbia's accession about to be on its agenda any time soon, it is evident that such a hysterical outburst was inspired by narrow partisan interests spurred up by the prospect of presidential elections. Without questioning the DSS's genuine animosity towards NATO, it is safe to consider that this "anti-NATO" campaign should be seen in the context of the pre-electoral debate, aiming to decrease the incumbent President Tadic's odds at the forthcoming presidential elections, as well as to degrade the overall standing of his Democratic Party's (DS) in the polls. It is not possible for President Tadic to publicly stand in the defence of NATO, but it is vital that he personally, together with the DS and other reform-oriented parties, stands ardently (rather than only very mildly) in straightforward defence of Serbia's interests, clearly coupling them with the Serbia's European and Euro-Atlantic integrations.

### ***Why the Integration?***

The main prospect for general development and a tangible improvement of living conditions for the ordinary citizen in any country, almost always comes through integration, networking and the varied modalities of international cooperation and exchange. This is especially the case for a (small, impoverished, traumatized by wars and isolation) country like Serbia. All obstacles in this regard, and above all those the obstacles that are anti-reformist in nature and that are aggressively imposed by a part of the governing classes, are directly jeopardizing essential interests of all people who live in Serbia. They are, thus, in essence *anti-Serb!* (to use the verbal weapons of the political adversary, for argument sake).

**The geographical position of Serbia determines its 2 main integration axis – the one leading into the EU and the other into NATO.** Serbia's interests in accession to the EU membership have been repeated numerous times; their underlying motivation spells-out better quality of life in all aspects and realms, from the quality of air, over education, to the healthcare system, from judiciary to the public transportation. Notwithstanding enormous financial and educational benefits that come with integrations, another – often overlooked advantage – which is of no lesser importance in the long-run, must be underscored. **The further we are in endorsing principles, procedures and standards of Europe, to which we geographically belong, the less we will depend on “charismatic leaders” (self-proclaimed gods) and “nation's fathers”,** who – not only during the 1990s – brought on colossal troubles with far-reaching ramifications. In other words, the closer to an orderly and sound system we are, the less we will depend on “shoot from the hip” decisions of politicians who have continuously demonstrated, for at least the last 7 years, that they have neither the urge nor the necessary capacity to modernize, adapt and excel (save for their own personal gain).

On the other hand, **NATO's integrative political and security umbrella would serve to release us from an ever-present anxiety that we could, once again, find ourselves isolated from global trends,** helpless and victimized by a group of belligerent psychopaths and criminals at the top of our country's political system; the bloody account of such leaders in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century includes pointless wars, hundreds of thousands of dead, displaced, morally, psychologically and financially destroyed inhabitants of former SFRY. A possible similar destructive activity of psychopaths with an international profile cannot be entirely ruled out, but can be considered unlikely. However, the fact that in the last 60 years only a single war was fought on the territory of Europe – the one in former Yugoslavia (or a set of interconnected wars if one wishes to differentiate) – clearly points to a place where the lessons must be learned, wounds healed and a genuine catharsis experienced.

**Partnership for Peace, implying a real partnership with all NATO member states, would enable Serbia to participate in equal right in resolving security challenges in its “own backyard” and contributing to stability and security in the entire Balkans** – and not only though being active in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). Serbia would again be valued in the natural company of its immediate neighbours – Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Italy – all of which are both EU and NATO members. **It is Milosevic's inexplicably ludicrous and in their deepest essence “anti-Serb” politics that brought us to the absurd situation in which the Alliance co-operated with a paramilitary formation in Kosovo to discipline Serbia! And now, instead of placing the blame on Milosevic and his coalition partners for having forced NATO's hand to intervene in 1999, for Kosovo's de-facto independence, and for the policies that lead there, the anti-reformist clique in our current leadership directs their bitter and misguided aggravations towards the international community, yet at the same time expecting its unreserved cooperation, support and assistance!**

**Serbia's genuine interest lies not in being an object of global politics, but in contributing to global stability by co-constructing a zone of security and development in Kosovo, and in the region through, fully-fledged partnership with both the EU and NATO. This should, therefore, also be Serbia's key objective.**

## **Verbal Manipulations**

Who, at the end, benefits from the antireform policies? Who profits from fruitless confrontations with the rest of the world, from a development stalemate, from a lack of order and from continued manipulation of Serbia's citizens? Who gains from a dismissal of all transition tasks and the legal obligations (such as the constitutional one to call timely elections) with the pretext that all political activities must be subject to the one, key national goal – and that is the “preservation” of Kosovo as a part of Serbia?

First of all, there is a cluster of utterly incapable politicians who are disinterested in *real* changes and have become ardent apostles of status-quo and mummification in centres of power. They cannot take pride in any real life achievements apart from a futile political career. In the last 7 years, the mastermind of this

group has been a meagre antireform sect which, via instruments and methodology rooted in the 1990s or prior, and using the cadres formed and famed in that sick era, has managed to manipulate both a poorly informed population and the political forces who should be of an entirely different, progressive orientation. They succeeded in creating an atmosphere in which issues of lesser importance or complete insignificance topped the political agenda and, wasting the resources and grabbing the spotlight, took the attention away from the actual, pressing life issues, problems and challenges. Let us recall the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, that monstrous hybrid-state, created after the FRY has – in all reality, ceased to exist. Let us recall the persistent and fervent political “war” that contradicted Serbia’s interests, waged against the referendum in Montenegro and, even worse, against the smaller republic’s legal and legitimate Government. This “war” was fought because several highly-ranked people in Serbia were unable to separate their intimate emotions from the national interests of Serbia. Recent insults directed at Montenegro confirm that some of them are still incapable of acknowledging the reality of Montenegro’s independence.

By way of verbal manipulations, these circles are skilful in concealing their inertness and incapacity to manage the issues of real-life importance which require painstaking, patient and gradual overcoming of transition’s challenges. Simultaneously, they seduce ordinary people with populist and easy-to-digest messages, always directed against someone or something – creating enemies where there are none, all of which goes against the long-term interests of these same people. This political clique is followed and supported by media of the same nature. As we recall, the most unscrupulous representatives of both political and media professions were the main protagonists responsible for the psychological war that brought about an “ethnic mobilization” which prepared the grounds for the actual war in the break-up of former SFRY. Precisely because the deeds and demeanour of statesmen and the media shape the mainstream political preferences of the population, those two notable professions bear major responsibility for any society’s wellbeing and even more so of the one undergoing a (belated) transition.

Next in line, and directly linked to the above-mentioned two, are the active “demolition-men” in state institutions, bred in Milosevic’s national-socialist era. The absence of lustration, the lack of criminal proceedings, the utter want of just remuneration for the accumulated misdemeanours and crimes, the lack of outright public condemnation (“name and shame”) and clear distancing from this recent past, the lack of reasonable knowledge and merit-based criteria for selection and career advancement in state institutions in the recent years, in a nutshell, the lack of genuine intention to radically break with the past – enabled a great number of people in key positions not only to politically survive but also to prevail and thrive. In this way, the retrograde forces are imposing on the reformists the hitherto developed political and institutional culture, as an established and acceptable model, effectively overwhelming and stifling the reformists and their reform-oriented efforts.

Building on and taking advantage of all of the above, the next group detracting Serbia from genuine reforms and transition, are the financial moguls and the state owned enterprises. The overwhelming majority of today’s wealthiest strata of Serbia’s society acquired their status and capital through profiting in favourable yet utterly irregular circumstances of national decay and mayhem of the 1990s. This diverse milieu encompasses personalities ranging from pure criminals to sleazy and unsavoury characters in the Milosevic-Markovic family entourage and in the state/partisan structures. The means of capital accrual are equally varied: from brutal misappropriation and dispersal of former SFRY budgetary and state resources, over various official and semi-official forms of racketeering, the provoking, fuelling and then profiting from the hyperinflation, to imposing internal economic sanctions... While it is hard to believe that this privileged kleptocratic class of the former system could ever be enlisted as genuine promoters of reforms, European standards and market economy, not all of them should be automatically assumed to be anti-reformists. In an effort to maintain and enlarge their capital, they financially support all political players, including the reformist ones as well. Furthermore, the integrations could come as an advantage for some of them.

On the other hand, party-managed state-owned companies, a source of anachronistic non-transparent management and corruption, pose a far greater threat. Their managing (in fact – ruling) structures, a mishmash of the official and political party powers, out of inertia and multiple interests firmly resist a much needed transformation of the ownership system. It is in the core interest of Serbia’s citizens that those

enterprises cease to be autonomous monopolistic structures, and to commence to adhere to the principles of sound financial management providing quality services (be it gas, electricity, gasoline, telephone, etc). In view of our modest political, party and managerial culture, measured against the overwhelming corruptive appetites, it would be advisable and desirable that the majority of those enterprises are turned over to sound and clean foreign capital with superb managerial capacities and an international business culture.

## ***Where do we go from here?***

**Serbia needs its reformist forces to reorganize and redefine themselves.** It is logical that the initiator and key protagonist of this task should be the largest party of the reformist bloc, that is, if this party intends to be as reformist in practice as it is words and in its campaigns. This could be done only if accompanied with a maximally constructive approach of all other reformist stakeholders.

**It is President Tadic's and DS's duty to overcome all hitherto rifts, personal animosities, vanities and party rivalries, as well as the hesitation, fear and calculations, and to resolutely venture into creating a new, genuinely reformist coalition / alliance.** This would politically corner the obstructive and shifty forces within the governing coalition, forcing them to take sides. While weaker in terms of percentage, by way of skilful political manipulation and tricks which successfully play on weakness and fear, the regressive forces managed – so far – to have the major say in governmental policies, dragging us further into destruction. The reformist option must refrain from its usual shy, vague and non-confrontational stance. It is only if it secures a resolute and united front – a true alliance in the direction of further reforms – that the fear of retrograde forces will crumble and that the double-faced will have to once and for all disclose their true faces and intentions. Once in the “clear”, they will have to opt for one of the sides, and whichever way they go, it will be good for Serbia.

Serbia's electorate that in 2000 enthusiastically and overwhelmingly voted for the reforms and cooperation with the world is falling ever deeper into apathy and political abstention; out of spite some of the disillusioned voters even support the extremist and populist political options. The lack of reforms, and thus also the lack of European integrations, accompanied with an infantile political conduct and confused public messages, render the people disappointed, dissatisfied and disinterested. In this phase of our transition, that is very unfortunate, even potentially disastrous.

Additionally, **it is necessary to affirm constitutionally and legally that regional cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration are not only our core interests, but also the single path for further, sustained and long-term development of our country.**

**Reform-oriented parties must open a real, issue-based and informed debate on EU integration, security integration and NATO accession, and all other important issues about which the citizens must learn in order to more confidently discern and make educated choices that will serve their future.**