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Serbia in the Party Labyrinth

Abstract

In this paper, the author attempts to determine the nature of the relationship between voters' social position and value set on the one hand, and the programmatic and pragmatic-political, market position of political parties on the other. The process of stabilizing and strengthening of their mutual relations and the consequent consolidation of the party scene would lead to a way out of the party labyrinth for citizens and political processes.

Keywords: parties, ideologies, political supply and demand, social rifts.

The Political Stage

The political configuration in Serbia is best presented as a horseshoe model with a wide frontal part and very close arms (Heywood, 2004:472). Until 2000, the horseshoe had a narrowed (and overcrowded) frontal (democratic) part and powerful arms, in particular the ruling, "left" one. From 2001 to 2008, with the rise of the radicals and the parallel decline of the socialists, the horseshoe was inclining to the right.

At the far poles-arms were initially located parties of the former regime. The farthest left and right positions actually share and shape both "patriotic", national-populist platform as well as social and anti-corruption rhetoric. At the same time, they both perceive the order established after October 5th, 2000 as a largely illegal, externally inspired, assisted and sustained "minion" regime. The advancement towards Serbia's European perspective and accession, which are acceptable in principle, must however, in their view, be accomplished on the country's own terms, or at the very least based on such criteria for EU accession that universally apply to all candidates and not by some specific "extortions and dictate imposed on Serbia."

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The gradual redesigning and the softening of previous hard lines, as well as the assuming of the role of a constructive political force within the opposition, but also within a broader, parliamentary, pro-regime majority (socialists), however, eventually raised doubts over the initial strategic principles.

The Evolution of Socialists

After stepping down from power, Milosevic's arrest and death, i.e. forced departure from the political stage of the formerly undisputed leader, SPS faced a series of (expected) internal divisions and reconfigurations. They were, more often than not, supported and inspired from circles outside the party, interested in the socialists' parliamentary support, or rather still, in the taking over of their electorate.

At the heart of these divisions are issues of programmatic and democratic party evolution and its distancing from the previous, decade-long governance practice focused on the attitude toward Slobodan Milošević. New party leadership revamps its hard lines and formulations about democratic socialism as the strategic party goal, on pluralism of ownerships, or preservation of social (non) ownership, and on the exaggerated (etatistic) welfare role of the state, in efforts to approach, at least programme-wise, the social-democratic political family.

The feature placing SPS on the traditional left is their proponenty for regulated market economy, mixed ownership structure and full employment, or advocacy to a better, more just and more humane society - democratic socialism (Serbia 2000 - A Step Into the New Century, 1996).

The Socialists underline the importance of collective bargaining, models of citizens' and employees' direct participation, as well as the necessity of environmental protection and highly developed environmental awareness. Their advocacy for permanent education and embracement of requirements of modern economy for skills development and e-training of the workforce belongs to the set of modern, even pro-market principles includes.

Further programmatic evolution toward the social democratic position is manifested in the 7th SPS Congress Programme Declaration from 2006, through their support for market economy, free enterprise

and autonomy of businesses. However, at the same time, the document retains powerful ideological rhetoric on exploitation, profit and capitalists, as well as a statement that the party is committed to the project of democratic socialism and not of softened capitalism.

In other words, in their 7th Congress Declaration, the Socialists emphasize that they alone stand for equality of ownership types, for the preservation and strengthening of the public sector, for guaranteed collective agreements and for the principle that the majority ownership of public companies and natural resources should remain in the hands of the state (Declaration 2006:9-18).

The Declaration underscores opposition to globalization, i.e. to globalist ideology and to Serbia's membership in military alliances. As their allies, the socialists view "genuine" workers' trade unions, anti-globalist and anti-fascist combatants' associations (Declaration of 8th SPS Congress 2006:6-7).

This process was carried on and it gained momentum following SPS entry into the ruling coalition in 2008, signing of the Declaration on Reconciliation and Common Goals with DS and the adoption of the new party programme at the congress held in 2010. The programme contains an almost exhaustive list of objectives characteristic of the European social-democratic family.

A new image in political life is also built, from the formal point of view, by politically correct public statements and the constructive and pragmatic approach to parliamentary decision-making, which first resulted in the support to Vojislav Koštunica's minority cabinet and then in entering into a coalition government with the block around DS after the 2008 elections.

In the background lies the self-interest of the party leadership to outlive the imminent and powerful political blows, given the party's (semi-)distancing from its past practice and leader, which comes from the now greatly reduced "party base" and from a disgruntled, critical democratic public. This is, at least in the short term, a kind of a "mission impossible", as guarantee of the parliamentary status and the social stronghold of this "party of the rural and the elderly" still are the poor and under-educated, with a greater-than-average propensity for conservatism, nationalism, state dirigisme, that is, for upholding the position of the authoritarian (pseudo) left.

The Division Among the Radicals

A separate, specific programmatic-political mix, covering almost the entire space between the left and right, is the radicals' parallel commitment to liberal principles and privatization, strong state interventionism and a developed solidarity-based social policy. Actually, the radicals crossed the path from initial state interventionism toward a liberal position contained in their 100-Point Programme from 2000, that is, advocacy for a minimal state and supremacy of private property, free market and enterprise and back toward re-advocating an active role of the state (Opening provisions of their 2006 Social and Economic Programme) and inclining toward the position of "left-centrist etatism" (Vukomanović 2007:87).

Thus, for example, general internal liberalisation is combined with the preservation of the state's majority share in all strategic and vital branches of the Serbian economy. SRS prefers the granting of concessions on strategic resources, with aim to secure their revitalization and protect the state from economic colonialism. Radicals also declare themselves as a party with the best social program, saying that they will create a special social map and put a stop to arbitrary lay-offs. Another attempt to articulate the views of the Serbia's poor majority is advocacy for education that is not a privilege of children from well-off families, i.e. that higher education institutions should sustain themselves and not make extra profit from education. The radicals also argue that they are the only party capable of reducing corruption to the very minimum, while at the same time waging an uncompromising battle against organized crime.

The radicals made a pragmatic turn by moving their strategic aim of creating a "Greater Serbia" into a distant future, while maintaining that they will achieve this goal, which implies expansion to the territories of sovereign neighbouring states solely by political means of struggle. An exception in this regard, for both the radicals and the progressives after the party split, is the realistic possibility of association and unification of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska. The impression of hard-line consistency with their principles transpires also in their highly centralist orientation on the issue of internal power distribution in Serbia, or namely, resistance to its regionalization, as well as in their earlier advocacy for a strong state union with Montenegro and lately, for the preservation of Kosovo within Serbia.

A hard-line and in some aspects even extreme nationalism, with saliently traditional patrimony, positions the radicals on the (far) right.

On the other hand, prominent social rhetoric, proponenty for strong state welfare policy, for social programmes, balanced salary and pension scales (in the public sector), state control over large infrastructural systems, places them on the left. The party officially (preferably) positions itself as a party of moderate, national right wing.

Fundamentally, it is right-wing national-populism, with prominent social elements which are the payoff for the populist character and broad-based party support.

Namely, the radicals projected, at least until their 2008 split, a far stronger image and impression of compactness, unity, strength and consistency. They absorbed a large share of the socialists' electorate by successfully exploiting the already patented and, to say the least, potentially volatile, national-social mix, this time in combination and fusion of national and social frustration of the massive, lower social classes.

In the meantime, the radicals gained a strong foothold in major cities, earning the status of the strongest single party, and entered the very corridors of power, determining, at least defensively by their sheer size and "extortion potential", the composition of every ruling coalition. Gradually, for parties of the centre-right, they moved from undesirable to possible - a second choice, a second-round alternative, as the May 2008 elections clearly demonstrated.

The conflict at the party top over the (non) acceptance of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, at first personal and tactical and after the departure of the group around Tomislav Nikolić and the creation of Serbian Progressive Party (SPS) also increasingly conceptual, may lead to a further re-positioning of PSS, which actually began already after Šešelj's departure to the Hague. After the split and the creation of new parties, xenophobia and the discourse on the West's conspiracy against Serbia were abandoned in the PSS programme objectives and it is underlined that the commitment to EU accession is undisputable, provided that Kosovo and Metohija is retained. On the other hand, cooperation with Russia, as well as with China, India and other great powers, but also friendly states, is unquestionable and unconditional.

In terms of economic and social goals, PSS, like most other parties, reiterates as a kind of political mantra its resolve to fight crime and corruption and support the rule of law, implementation of a fair privatization and a retroactive review of legitimacy of past privatizations, as well as stemming unemployment and promoting economic and social welfare.

The “Progressives” show that, under certain conditions, primarily their open access to power, they might even cooperate with the Democrats, within the overall framework of the European orientation.

On the other hand, the weakened remainder of the radicals, become a frail and less than desirable partner even for the progressives. Previous local by-elections and public opinion polls show that the balance of power between the progressives and the radicals stands at approximately 3.5: 1 in favour of the progressives.

Populist Centre-Right

A still relatively dominant, but constantly declining position within the national-democratic, traditionalist centre-right bloc, committed to legal, progressive reforms and advancement towards Europe and the world at a pace supported by the majority of citizens and securing the preservation of Kosovo within Serbia, is held by DSS.

The distinctiveness of DSS position is reflected in their consistent association of economic and political system transformation with constitutional reform. The new economic system is based on the free market with its four by-constitutive elements - capital, labour, goods and services and on predominantly private ownership, with a parallel existence of both state and cooperative ownership.

The conspicuously solidaristic tone and charge of their rhetoric, which also draws on the populist and Christian-social inspiration and the identity of the political family to which DSS belongs, is featured in explicit programme appeals for solidarity, social justice and social role, which the state must take over from the economy.

The state's prime responsibility lies in the process of privatization. Resources accumulated through privatization, consistent with the principles of rights and justice, must be used to compensate restitution claimants, holders of old (lost) hard currency savings, servicing of the foreign debt, replenishment of pension funds and (minority) shareholding of employees in their company's assets.

The principle of social justice is defined as the opportunity for and right of all community members to self-development, education, family creation and quality living conditions.

Guaranteed social security includes rights to basic health care, pension and disability insurance, welfare payment, unemployment benefit and protection of children, youth and persons with disabilities.

Within this framework, it is hardly surprising that DSS, as a centre-right party of the populist i.e. solidaristic orientation, often positions itself on the plane of social policies and programmes to the left from DS and its proclaimed position which is, if not quite social-democratic, at least a social-liberal one.

But, the feature that particularly sets the position of this party apart from others, especially after the self-declared independence of Kosovo in 2008, is its extremely critical stance towards the EU and its very distinct anti - NATO position, comparable only to that of the radicals. As could be expected, this position does not enjoy much understanding within the populist political group of which DSS is an associate member.

Re-Positioning of the Democratic Party

If the parties of the former regime gathered citizens - losers of the social transition process and if the block around DSS best represented the social average of Serbia, then DS and parties around it above all articulate the will of the pro-reform - younger, more educated part of Serbia (Slavujević 2002:161-167).

However, the third ruling civil-democratic bloc, from 2000 to 2003 and again after the 2008 elections, besides DS as its pivotal party (and one of the two currently strongest political parties) comprises a large number of parties, most of which, with the exception of regional and ethnic parties, have no prospects of any independent electoral success. Aside from parties of the centre and moderate, social-democratic left (which show a tendency to merge with DS through different modalities) this group also includes the majority of regional and ethnic minority parties. The scope of the spectrum thus explicitly points to the still dominant tactical, interest-calculating basis for joining of this coalition

The Democratic Party is an example of a centre party with highly pragmatic -problem orientation, which abandons the principle of explicit and precise positioning on the left-right continuum. Programme-wise, it defined itself (in 1992) as a “modern party of civic centre”, then as a “modern civic people’s party of liberal orientation” (1996). However, with its Programme from 2001 and by approaching to the Socialist International, its position was implicitly becoming more social-democratic, or rather social-liberal.

Orientation to problem-solving (policy approach) and the consequent continuous revision, re-examination and upgrading of solutions

are incompatible with the creation of comprehensive and long-term programmes. A good example of this practice is the evolution of the concept of privatization. The Programme from 1995 promotes the model of voucher privatization, i.e. free transfer of the majority share in existing “socially owned assets” to all grown up citizens. However, the Programme from 2001 makes no reference to specific types of privatization, while the DS-led government is simultaneously implementing both tender and auction privatization models.

Economic vision of DS is that of Serbia as a country with stable economic institutions, good infrastructure and a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises that are flexible and able to adjust to global market fluctuations. Consequently, Serbia will predominantly be a country of the middle classes - active and enterprising citizens with good qualifications, quality jobs and incomes sufficient for a decent life, education of children and carefree old age.

On this path, the state exercises its public service function in economy by creating strong institutions that protect citizens - from rule of law institutions to regulation of labour rights, social security, pension benefits, as well as health care and education. It does so also through a responsible budgetary practice and anti-monopoly policy.

The DS perceives itself as a “socially responsible party”, which involves both solidarity and a minimum of social protection. However, social welfare must not serve as a pretext for individuals to relinquish self-engagement and self-help, but an incentive for individual action. In this and similar views, inspiration drawn from the experience of the European social model, “third way” model and social investment state is evident.

DS's half-step to the left, i.e. toward the Socialist International also seems to have had a dominantly pragmatic basis. In simple terms, it was a result of the calculation that in this part of the political spectrum (for the time being) unoccupied by a strong, relevant social-democratic party, it could expand its own political influence as well as keep under control and integrate many unconsolidated parties of the centre-left (Stojiljković 2008:150).

Thus, it is moving from its initial elitist position and image towards the format of a mass party with high-quality and qualified human resources - a distinctive political mix which should open the party also to the basic classes of society.

Mind you, the proclaimed social-democratic position, international connections and the status within the SI and the Party of European

Socialists (PES), or in their regional forums, the resulting “social-democratization” of political rhetoric and, particularly, the sobering and “lean” opposition status between 2004 and 2007 have somewhat strengthened the perception that DS, at least in the medium to long term, is indeed a centre-left party.

Consequently, unlike earlier surveys which showed that DS supporters and voters themselves perceive their party’s position rather to the right than to the left from the political centre, polls conducted after 2006 show that it is now dominantly seen as a party of modern democratic and moderate left. Its key, indisputable values are democratic, competitive and pluralist policy-institutional arrangement, modernism and reformism, cosmopolitanism, moderate (un)religiousness and tolerance, as well as the concept of qualitative, desirable chosen growth, i.e. socially and environmentally sustainable development.

The remaining problem is the democrats’ “neo-liberal drift” in the sphere of their vision of a preferred and possible economic and social policy, expressed, primarily, through their high regard for “self-care” and their preference for and embracement of market, rather than social justice principles and values.

The mainstream of DS supporters do not belong to market fundamentalists and understand that the market cannot automatically secure full employment, provide for health care, education, housing development, traffic or environmental protection, i.e. that regulatory measures and mechanisms must exist. But the essence of their position is best expressed by the slogan of the “Third Way” adherents - “Maximize market and competition – reduce regulation to the minimum”. However, their repositioning and, of course, nearly a quarter of votes won in the 2007 and a third in the 2008 elections make DS by far the most influential and credible player in the position of the left, social-democratic centre.

The Fragmented Social Democracy

Still subsisting on the margins of the political scene is a fragmented and atomized group of parties with a clear-cut social-democratic position and profile, troubled as if by fate, with perpetual appeals for unification followed by new splits and divisions.

The Programme of the Social Democratic Union (SDU) which emerged in 1996 from a splinter of the Civic Alliance, features a consistent anti-nationalist position, advocacy for participatory and dialogue forms of democracy and for extending the space of equality to

all minority groups, namely a consistent anti-discriminatory position. The position of this party, like that of LSV, is also characterized by the practical opposition to the tide of traditionalism, conservatism and excessive presence of religious organisations in the education process, public and political life.

SDU and (until 2008) LSV, within the coalition with Čeda Jovanović's LDP, passed the threshold and entered into the parliament as representatives of the radically modernist, anti-nationalist and pro-European option viewing Boris Tadić's DS as too mainstream a political party, or a party lacking in credible modernizing potential. The problem, however, is that these two self-proclaimed social democratic parties espoused the coalition's hard-line (neo) liberal economic and social election programme.

Following the 2008 elections, a new contender arising in the promising, divisions-plagued field of "genuine social democracy" was Rasim Ljajić's SDP.

At the same time, DS's move to the political mainstream caused the separation of Čeda Jovanović's LDP, which, together with Nenad Čanak's LSV and the remainder of GSS and SDU, aspires to the position of the "firekeeper" - the most radical proponent of civic- reformist, European orientation in Serbian politics - the "guardian of Djindjić's political legacy."

Political Trajectory of G17 Plus

On the other side, the transformation and profiling of an influential group of experts, G17 Plus, into a party with a distinct liberal, modernizing orientation points to the possibility of the emergence of a liberal, pro-Western centre-right.

The background of G17 Plus as an expert group with a saliently liberal orientation, which proposes radical and rapid privatization, practically reduced the role of the state to internal and external security and the protection of observance of contracts and laws. Social justice is meritocratically linked to the principle that everyone participates in the distribution according to their contribution, which positions this party on the centre right.

The classical liberal paradigm is contained in the principle "maximum market – state only as necessary" and in efforts to defend the "four market pillars" - private property, free initiative, stable currency and competitive environment (G17 Plus Programme).

The collision with real life and with political competition led to the significant programme shift toward the centre. This is mainly reflected in their advocacy of social-market economy, solidarity, social dialogue and agreement, directed at poverty-reduction, job creation and the creation of an adequate social protection system.

The social partnership and dialogue between the Government, trade unions and employers should promote employment rather than individual jobs. Key macroeconomic indicators (production, employment, wages, inflation) should be established by agreement and improved according to an agreed schedule. Aside from the operational poverty reduction strategy and promotion of productive employment, Serbia must begin to participate in the EU Strategy for social inclusion. This strategy is based on the strengthening of social cohesion through inclusion of socially marginalized groups – by implementing the principles of positive discrimination (“affirmative action”) into economic life.

Public opinion polls, however, suggest that, unlike the period prior to the 2003 parliamentary elections, this party cannot count on a secure parliamentary status. The drop in G17 Plus ratings is also payment for their participation in the government, or more specifically, of the impression created that they are technologists of power rather than experts above politics.

The current opening of the issue of decentralization and regionalization of Serbia and gathering of the local political parties and officials in the Party of Regions, however, demonstrates a well-tuned political nerve and self-preservation reflex of G17 Plus and its leader, Mladen Dinkić.

LDP - Radical Modernism and Euro-Atlantism

The political market offer is complete with the creation and parliamentarization of LDP. Created in 2005 from a splinter of DS, LDP merged with the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS) in 2007. The position of LDP is primarily characterized by the radical position of staying outside the “constitutional and Kosovo consensus” which involved a wide range of parliamentary parties from 2006. LDP does not wish to be just one of the many, but a party with a mission of creating discontinuity with the values, figures and parties of the Milošević regime. Their insistence on the implementation of lustration, dissatisfaction with the procedure of passing but also with the content of the 2006 Constitution, particularly their criticism of the achievements of decentralization, are some of the singularities of LDP. A specific stance is articulated and designated by LDP also with regard the Equality Law which should equalize the

position of same-sex and heterosexual couples, against the prevailing patrimonial and homophobic model. "Against the flow" also describes their position on the recognition of Kosovo's independence, i.e. support to plan 2K, or in simple terms, ceding of territories in exchange for equality and constitutionality and the principle of consensuality. Possibility for coexistence of Albanians and Serbs is seen in surrendering administration of territory in return for a binding commitment of the Kosovo authorities' to guarantee equal rights for Serbs as those enjoyed by the majority Albanians. On the socio-economic plane, LDP stands for economy without limits, accelerated transition, privatization, denationalization and for the liberalization of financial transactions with the world. Their patently market-liberal position is also contained in their advocacy of the tax system reform, control of public revenues and expenditures and budgetary balance. In the sphere of social policy, too, with their rhetoric about a society of equal opportunities, freedom of education, of action and association and of free lifestyle choice, LDP sticks to its original liberal inspiration. Programme-wise, LDP is actually based on three pillars - modern economy, modern education and efficient and cost-effective state. Reduction of public spending to a third of GDP, introduction of competition into the public sector institutions and companies - cutting down corruption, through abolishment of subsidies and rents, firm anti-monopoly legislation are, together with the concept of lifelong learning and the downsizing and modernisation of state administration through e-government, key programmatic and practical-political priorities (Different Serbia 2007:17-34).

Political Positioning

If in the liberal segment of the political spectrum the position of DS could be designated as social-liberal and that of G17 Plus as liberal-democratic, then LDP is closest to the neoliberal or libertarian position. With its admission in 2008 to ELDR and the Liberal International, LDP officially received the recognition and verification of its liberal position, unlike DS which opted for the social-democratic, or G17 which, inconsistent with its programme, opted for the conservative, "populist" political family.

In conclusion, we could state that the horseshoe model best responds to the questions about the scope of the political spectrum and the shifting/repositioning of parties in it.

At the same time, the issue arising is that of the methodological grounds and interpretive basis for grouping Serbian parties in their respective political families. This grouping, beyond the parties' self-

proclaimed positions, detects the reasons and the logic of the programmatic and practical evolution of parties.

The most pertinent appears to be Herbert Kitschelt's five-category classification which is based on combining classical political dimensions: left-right, along with the divisional axis: authoritarian-libertarian.

The elements of classification, i.e. political families include: 1) Left-liberal parties; 2) Social democrats, 3) Christian-democratic and national-secular parties, 4) Market-liberal parties, 5) Right-authoritarian parties (Kitschelt 2003:9).

To this classification, pertinent for most post-industrial countries in Europe, we would add the 6th and 7th element or political family when it applies to Serbia and "heavy" transition societies. It comprises traditional, authoritarian and, usually, nationalist left, which in Serbia is still dominantly comprised of SPS and a group of ethnic and regional parties.

A common trait of regional and ethnic parties is that they are focused on their key issue on the political agenda, without further clarifying their positions on a range of other topical issues, even if their own political space is extremely competitive and fragmented.

An illustrative fact in this regard is that, out of the 76 registered parties, as many as 43 are registered as national minority parties.

On the other side, besides a previous marginal presence in the parliament of the self-declared peasants' parties, the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS) is a single successful example of interest group party representation. Mind you, the 1.6 million pensioners indeed represent the largest electoral clientele in Serbia.

The social-democratic field is currently vacant and contenders for this position are located on the left-libertarian, social-liberal (DS) or left-authoritarian position (SPS).

The position of pro-European market liberals is occupied by G17 Plus and LDP. But, while parties positioned to the left from the centre, primarily DS, can count on even more than a third of votes, the civic, market-liberal orientation and its parties can only count on one tenth of the electorate.

A promising and largely overcrowded political field is the Christian-democratic or conservative, remarkably national centre-right position. The political family of the populist and conservative parties includes DSS and NS, but also a Euro-enthusiastic SPO. As well as hard-line national positions of former radicals which, even by their new party names – Progressive (Tomislav Nikolić) and People's (Maja Gojković) articulate a claim to (re)positioning towards the centre-right.

Current situation (2011)			
	GS	GJ	O
Liberal		G17 Plus	LDP
Conservative		SPO	DSS NS SNS
Nationalist			SRS
Social-liberal	DS		
Left authoritarian		SPS	
Ethnic/Regional		List for Sandžak, SVM, Party of Albanians	

Legend: GS – lead party; GJ – ruling coalition partner; O - opposition;

Table: Parties' programme orientation

Evidently, the centre-right position is also fragmented by divisions along traditionalist/modernist, national-democratic/ Europeans, liberal/conservative, regionalist/centralist and many other dividing lines.

On the authoritarian-right position, despite some redesigning of their messages and entry into the “constitutional vault of parliamentary parties” in 2006 is also the Serbian Radical Party.

Social Rifts and Political Choices

In their analysis of the relation between social and political divisions in Serbia, Slavujević, Pantić and Komšić used five indicators to categorise the electorate and to position relevant parties: 1) self-positioning of voters or supporters of the relevant parties along the line of political divisions (left-right; 2) index of their attitudinal differentiation; 3) the positioning of the relevant parties by their supporters; as well as (4) official self-positioning, and 5) programmatic positioning of the parties themselves.

In the (2003) research, Zoran Slavujević notes that the share of voters who are willing and able to classify themselves along the left-right continuum is below the (over a half) segment of party-oriented citizens (Slavujević 2003:132).

A similar finding was obtained in a number of other studies (CPA 2002; Mihailović et al. 2003; Cesid 2004).

The research findings corroborate the thesis on the still dominantly low prevalence, transience and “artificiality” of the left-right division in Serbia, that is, lead to the conclusion on the prospective party redistribution along this axis to correspond with its anticipated growing importance. An indirect argument in support of this thesis is the presence of a particular political paradox - the majority of the electorate attitudinally expresses a “leftist sentiment”, whilst at the same time voting for centre or right parties. For example, in a Cesid survey (May 2004), within just over a half of citizens who identify themselves on the scale: left-right, the balance is 2 (right) and 1.5: 1 (left), while polar positions on both the left and right ends are more widely accepted than their moderate wings.

The unblocking and the “stepping-up” of transition and privatization, combined with the time distance from the Milošević quasi-left regime brings about two significant changes in this domain. First, research done in 2006 shows that, unlike the previous domination of the centre-right position, we now have fully balanced power positions, with moderate positions both left and right far stronger than their extreme poles. Less than one tenth of citizens consider themselves to be either radical left or right. At the same time, equal preference for the left and right is shown by key segments of society: skilled and highly skilled workers, technicians, white collar employees, professionals as well as housewives. Farmers and pensioners show preference for the left, while just above the average right-wise propensity is noted among pupils and students, the unemployed and, as expected, owners (Mihailović 2006).

Thus, apparently against expectations, the social background in its narrower, professional – class meaning is not a significant determinant of the preference for left or right, since the latter was formed relatively late and was for a long time masked by, only distantly related, national and political-cultural divisions. Preferences for the left, centre or right are, as expected, mainly influenced by party allegiance ($C_k = 0.42$). Most leftists and fewest rightists can be found among supporters of SPS (64:8). On the opposite pole are the radicals’ voters, half of them right-oriented, but also a non-negligible one quarter left-minded. In the middle are DS supporters, who are slightly more left-oriented (36:23) but dominantly “centrist”, and then supporters of DSS, with 2 (moderate) leftists by every 4 centrists and 4 rightists. From the overall perspective, leftists most often lack strong party identity (35%), next are DS adherents (22%), followed by the supporters of the old regime of

the radicals (15%) and socialists (13%). A similar structure, paradoxical from the point of view of current political divisions, is shown within the support to the right – the majority are not affiliated to any party (37%), then radicals (26%), closely followed by DS (13%) and then by DSS supporters (11%).

Political Values and Party Allegiance

Even more indicative are findings on the acceptability of rivaling political ideologies – social-democratic, Christian democratic, conservative, liberal, as well as nationalist and communist. Within an approximate half of citizens who are able to position themselves, a vast majority – two fifths – prefers social democracy. DS has the highest share of social democrats in the total number of supporters – 32%, while next to it are, somewhat unexpectedly, DSS and G17 Plus with 29% each. The second, “reserve” ideology among DS and G17 Plus supporters is liberalism (10-14%), and among DSS supporters Christian democracy (12%). SPS supporters are almost evenly divided into those embracing communism and social democracy, though with a slightly higher share of neo-communists (27%: 24%). Supporters of SPO are split “into even parts” – one fifth each, between liberalism, social-democrats and Christian democrats. Within just a half of the radicals’ voters who can formulate their view, there are equal shares (15% each) of social democracy and nationalism supporters. Only in the case of LDP supporters is social democracy second-rated. Within LDP, liberalism is twice more accepted than the social democratic concept (47%: 23%) (Cesid 2006).

However, divisions based on historical-ethnic and cultural-value distinctions have the key role in the classification of parties, but also of the electorate. Based on these distinctions, parties can be classified into national-conservative and civic-modernist groups. The correlation between the national-civic (historical-ethnic), and traditionalism-modernism (cultural-value split) axes is, in fact, very high ($C = 0.7$), with the national overlapping with the traditional and civic with the modern, so that, with some simplification, we can talk about a single axis: traditional (conservative) nationalism – civic modernism (reformism). The synergic effect of these axes could contribute to the consolidation of the political supply and to the streamlining of the party scene (Slavujević, Komšić, Pantić 2003:176).

According to the survey, overall, in mid-2003, traditionalism prevails over modernity (41%: 27%), while every third respondent belongs to the “mixed” type (Pantić 2003:110).

The Social Rooting of Political Parties

By summarizing the findings on the nature of the relationship between social cleavage lines and party identification, we can conclude that the ideological line of the left-right division is also in correlation, though weaker in intensity, with the other two previously analyzed lines of political division.

Apparently contrary to expectations, voters of the pro-national and traditional orientation, "traditional social-nationalists", from socially lower and older population segments tend to concentrate above the average on the "left", while younger voters of civic and modernist orientation are positioned at the centre and right (centro-rightists). For example, in a Cesis survey from April 2005, more than half of those who are "left-minded" belong to the lower classes (58%), average - "moderate" are members of the middle class (42%), while members of the higher social class are far below the average (13 %) among leftists.

At the same time, low social status (and age), or belonging to the groups such as farmers, unskilled workers, housewives, uneducated are the social correlate for the preservation of the dominant conservatism. The division within the Serbian electorate into the left, centre and right shows, as in other countries with a delayed, distorted, previously "blocked" (Mladen Lazić) transition, complete inversion compared to conventional value orientations that are related to this (West European) ideological division (Slavujević, Komšić, Pantić 2003:176).

With all simplifications, it might be concluded that the supporters of the parties of former regime are chiefly recruited - based on the prevailing values of traditionalism, nationalism and etatism, from lower social classes, while parties from the democratic bloc rely on the middle classes. A watershed between these two blocks comprises qualified workers, divided between the two, on whose support to one side or the other, their future balance of power largely depends (CESID 2005).

After 2008 and the outbreak of the crisis of planetary dimensions, which has had a severe impact on Serbia, too, the functional division seems to have been weakening further, along with the decline due to the trend of impoverishment, of its (neo) liberal, but also ruling - officially "socially responsible" political pole.

On the other hand, processes such as inter-party transfers of supporters, steep increase or decline of the support to some political options, as well as the splits within some parties, have resulted in the "wandering" of political parties in search for their identities in the

political arena of Serbia. Thus, some of them which, at the outset of the period of pluralism, managed to profile themselves and take root in particular social groups, have, over the course of time, lost their identities due to these processes. Another feature of all parties in Serbia is certainly that they have no distinct social profile, which is especially true of the mainstream parties swept by the process of massive expansion.

Yet, at least the “minor” and parties of national minorities can be said to have a more distinct social profile. For example, LDP is largely a party of young, educated and urban classes.

The Political Parties’ Social Profile

A general conclusion that is possible to reach from a variety of public opinion polls is that citizens who regard themselves as transitional losers and belong to lower social classes largely give their confidence to the parties of the former regime.

Although in recent years, some changes in social profiles have been observed and it seems that the usual distinction that urban and more educated citizens vote for DS and other democratic option parties and rural, less educated and the older vote for the radicals has been overcome, it can be concluded that there is a link between parties of the former regime and voters belonging to lower social classes. On the other hand, the democratic bloc largely relies on the middle classes.

The Democratic Party – pivot of the ruling coalition, is an example of a party which, at the beginning of its political life, was a party of young people, intellectuals and professionals, to be later swept by the process of “de-intellectualization”. As a result, and due to the increased number of supporters after the October changes, but also the transfer of G17 Plus and LDP supporters, the party now has a broader social base. Research done in the last three years shows that the social structure of the party has somewhat stabilized, as dominant among its followers are middle-aged citizens with secondary education who live in urban areas. Still, DS has more supporters from the ranks of educated citizens and those with the higher social status than the socialists and “progressives”.

The most similar to the social profile of DS are those of G 17 Plus and LDP.

G 17 Plus, following its transformation from an expert group into a political party, attracted supporters of DS and profiled itself as the party of the urban and the youngest, mid- and highly educated voters. However, in late 2005 as a result of “tenure” in the government and the fact that the

In which of these social groups would you position yourself and your family	DS	DSS	PSS	SPS	SRS	Others	Non-partisan	Total
Middle class	25%	8%	4%	2%	9%	6%	46%	100%
White collar employees	31%	8%	2%	2%	7%	3%	47%	100%
Workers	13%	5%	6%	3%	19%	4%	50%	100%
Farmers	5%	6%	35%	6%	30%	4%	46%	100%
Lower class	5%	3%	1%	8%	26%	3%	54%	100%
Do not know	6%	4%	6%	3%	4%	6%	71%	100%
Percentage	15%	6%	4%	3%	17%	5%	50%	100%

Table: Class self-identification and party orientation (Cesid - July 2005)

G 17 electorate is the same as that of DS, its ratings decline. It leads to the dropout of the youngest and voters with secondary education. However, even after all these changes, G17 Plus remains attractive to working-age professionals.

Within the social structure of the Liberal Democratic Party young, mid- and highly educated voters are dominant.

The Serbian Radical Party until 2000 profiled itself as a party of mainly urban, male voters, initially young and later older, mostly with lower and secondary education, who now dominantly represent the social profile of the radicals.

There is still no reliable data which could yield conclusions about the social profile of the Serbian Progressive Party, although at first glance it seems that middle-aged citizens are dominant. If some generalizations are made, it could be said that among the progressives, there is a high number of pensioners, unemployed as among the radicals, as well as a significant percentage of housewives.

The Democratic Party of Serbia, just like DS, has experienced “de-intellectualization” and a radical change of its social structure. Major changes have occurred after 2000, “when the party saw a sharp increase in the number of its supporters”. The reverse process – some kind of a turn back, occurred after 2003, due to the dispersion of its supporters. Even after all these changes, DSS remains attractive for all voter groups,

although somewhat more attractive for the urban, educated and older population past working age.

Employment and ownership status	DS L	DP	G17 Plus	SPS	DSS	NS S	NS	SRS
Private businessman, owner	6,3	12,7	5,8	7,6	3,5	3,6	4,7	3,9
Employed in private sector	18	16,3	23,3	16,7	14,6	16,9	16,5	19
Employed in public sector	15	17,2	27,9	14,4	27,9	16,9	11,9	11,7
Unemployed	15,6	11,3	5,8	13,6	16,8	14,5	19,2	16,5
Pensioner	23,3	17,6	11,6	37,1	28,3	16,9	27,3	26,4
Farmer	2,9	2,7	3,5	2,3	2,7	8,4	4	7,4
Housewife	7,7	8,6	8,1	8,3	2,7	12	8,6	7,8
Pupil, student	10,5	13,6	14	-	3,5	10,8	7,7	7,4

Source: Cesis, October 2008

New Serbia has a similar profile of supporters to that of DSS, with a higher share of farmers, housewives and students.

From the distinctly working-class, the Socialist Party of Serbia has transformed itself into a rural party, with the major share of farmers, followed by inactive parts of the electorate, mostly pensioners and housewives. At the same time, SPS is also the party to the oldest, least educated and poor citizens

The Spatial - Positional Interpretation of the Field of Politics

The story about the nature and intensity of the relationship between the social and political lines of divisions and splits can be re-interpreted and considered from the perspective of a specific and autonomous political

space and political actors' interest matrix. Through the methodological approach based on the market theory of politics, the political space can be presented and analyzed as a concentric circle - a series of three interrelated political markets.

The broadest market and the outer circle of politics is the point of convergence of the political supply and demand.

The market, more specifically, political demand is underdeveloped, "shallow", but not devoid of any development potential, and it is "promising". Judging by the research findings, a mere half of the voters - "consumers" has at least some party and political identification and orientation in the left - right dimensioning of the political space. At the same time, large transfers within and between political blocs, and just a two-decade-old market attest to its potential and openness. Along the left - right interests continuum, the demand of the poor majority of voters is concentrated in the space of moderate redistributive policies, pushing the political actors who aspire to a central role to the (left) centre.

However, the complexity of the political map and the dominance of the historical-ethnic and value divisions along the line of traditionalism versus modernism, makes the market diverse and open, like Rubik's cube, for all possible re-combinations. At the same time, oversaturation of the left-right division by layers of ethnic and political-cultural divisions, like Kosovo and / or Europe, offers a possible explanation of the weak and multi-mediated relationship between the social - professional and party - political affiliation.

The central circle is the inter-party market which shapes the relations on the political scene and determines the range of political supply. Potential political entrepreneurs are confronted with the setup of existing market participants and must position their product and make it recognizable and desirable. The logic of the market struggle makes the relations of actors interested in the same segment of the client audience the most delicate - contenders are in a situation either to eject and marginalize their nearest competition, or to unite with it.

Similar to tendencies of creating economic cartels, there is a tendency to form political ones. They consist of blocks of power from different parts of the political spectrum united in the logic of coalition (post-) election strategy and of combining national demagoguery, rhetoric and social pro-European political mantras as a market-winning combination - a kind of political evergreen.

When it comes to the political market supply, the influence of the external environment should not be understated, namely that of veto-players in the back-stages, or key players behind the political scenes. The

command tower or marketplace management, which largely steers the relations, roles and prices on the political scene comprises actors such as the great powers and their local representatives, powerful economic groups and interests, but also religious and intellectual circles and representatives of large and organized groups such as pensioners and employees, which are interesting as large distributional coalitions, at least in the election race.

Finally, the narrowest, inner circle is a small, intra-party market with its additional, specific logic of divisions, conflicts and associations, based on the re-combination of human, pragmatic, but also programmatic and strategic internal differences. The split within SRS, the departure of Nikolić and Vučić and the creation of SNS represent an example of the combining of internal reasons and external incentives, personal conflicts and frustration over the “eternal” staying in the corridors of power, reinforced and argued by tactical and then by programmatic evolution.

It is possible to conclude that existing political (up) setting in Serbia is increasingly faced with a rising mistrust among consumers - political audience toward political actors. Today's Serbia seems to have experienced a severance of ties between citizens and the political elite. The current crisis only further exacerbates the existing, almost dramatic legitimacy deficit of political, but also of most civil actors and institutions.

Consequently, it is reasonable to expect further shifts, regroupings and re-positionings on the political supply side, both in the spatial dimension: regionalism - centralism, and along its developmental, social and integration (European) continuum. All relevant parties will attempt to enter into a zone of basic consensus which lies in the commitment to Serbia as a rule of law, democratic, European and socially responsible state and society.

Perspectives

Research results yield possibilities for formulating several working hypotheses. First, given the growing importance of socio-economic issues and their key impact on voter preferences, almost all parties, in this dimension, actually position themselves in the space around the centre or even to the left of it. The struggle for bare survival of the numerous and broad social classes drives parties to overstate elements of solidarity, social cohesion and justice in their programmes, in order to win voter support in a narrowed space for manoeuvre. This leads to the confusion in the positioning on the continuum: left-right, accompanied by confusion in the self-identification of voters and party affiliates.

It is further induced by the resistance of some voters to identify themselves with the effects of the former "leftist regime", stigmatized by the very term "leftist".

Consequently, in the political spectrum of Serbia, there is a large vacant space waiting for the emergence of a relevant party of the centre-left or social-democratic orientation. At the same time, for a variety of economic, social, cultural-traditional reasons, its prospects for the time being are still limited, despite efforts by both DS and SPS to take over this space.

Part of the potential, traditional clientele of the poor, lower classes is "infected" by the conservative and authoritarian populism and etatism, or "social nationalism". Younger, more educated, reform-minded part of the population is (un)consciously attached to the centre-right parties. The highest status inconsistency and uncertainty, accompanied by the highest political segmentation, is shown by the lower middle classes - skilled workers, technicians and white collar workers, as well as professionals from the sphere of social (public) services - a group which could, above all others, be the "social clientele" of the social-democratic party. On the other hand, the centre-right space is also largely fragmented by divisions to traditionalists and modernists, national democrats, and Europeans, liberals and conservatives, regionalists and centralists and other types of division.¹

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- 1 The declaration of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on July 7th 2008, which is actually a coalition of groups around DS and SPS, may mark a turning point on Serbia's party-political scene. Former bitter political rivals, DS and SPS found themselves in the same government and on October 18th 2008 signed a "Declaration on political reconciliation and shared responsibility for achieving the vision of Serbia as a democratic, free, indivisible, economically and culturally developed and socially just country." EU membership is stated as the strategic orientation of Serbia. Europe itself is perceived in the social democratic perspective. A common European home is seen as a social-democratic project of the "welfare state", responsible and solidary social state and society (p. 3). It is the responsibility of such a state to secure human dignity and jobs for everyone. By emphasizing that Serbia will retain strategic control over key infrastructure and public companies, the preferred social-democratic concept of "mixed economy" is least partially retained (p. 4). The Declaration includes commitments to: social security and solidarity, reduction of drastic social disparities, social justice as equal prospects and affirmative action in favour of the marginalized classes and ethnic and other minority groups. The key starting point is the belief that a socially responsible society can only be achieved through social justice and that without solidarity there is no humane society. The signed Declaration, unless a mere act of political marketing, can have a constructive impact not only on mutual relations between Democrats and Socialists, but also for the relaxation of relations on the broader political - party scene in Serbia. On the right side of the political spectrum, the rift within SRS and the creation of SNS, which aims to become the key party of the centre-right not opposed to European integration, has had a similar effect.

It is realistic to expect that struggle for the status of key pivotal party will occur in this part of the spectrum, both at its civic-modernizing and national-traditional pole.

As a consequence, Serbia, due to its complex national and regional map, along with 2-3 "big parties" and their occasional partners and / or rivals, will for a relatively long time have relatively numerous, coalition-relevant parties of national minorities, as well as parties with a regional prefix and outreach.

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