

## Serbia goes to the polls

Пише: Tomislav Nikolić  
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Sunday, Serbian voters will go to the polls to elect a new parliament. It is expected the Serbian Radical Party, which for some years has been Serbia 's most popular and has held the greatest number of parliamentary seats, will form a new government, either alone or in coalition with other parties.

In such case, I am confident we finally will have a government that, unlike in the recent past, will have a unified position on the key challenges facing our country.

Outside Serbia, this election often is portrayed as a choice between "pro-Western" parties determined to take Serbia "forward" toward " Europe " versus parties, led by the Radicals, looking "backward" toward "nationalism" and an exclusive pro-Moscow orientation.

This is not an accurate understanding of this election's importance. Rather, voters will choose either the direction advocated by the Radicals, in which rule of law, European integration and economic liberalization go hand-in-hand with Serbia 's legitimate national interests, or they will choose an illusion of faster integration promised by other parties that would undermine Serbia 's territorial integrity.

The latter choice would allow those same parties to continue business as usual, which has made their political leaders wealthy while most of our citizens struggle to pay for basic living necessities.

Such parties, led by the Democratic Party of President Boris Tadic, rely on scare tactics and false promises to stay in power and hope Serbian voters won't be able to see the falsity of such tactics and promises.

In fact, the Serbian Radical Party is not at all opposed to Serbia 's accession to the European Union. However, the EU's relationship with Serbia must be based on mutual respect and observance of binding international commitments, including all provisions of the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.

It should be kept in mind that Serbia is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse country in Europe. Far from the "ultra-nationalist" label some seek to apply to our party, the Radicals have embraced Serbia 's multi-ethnic composition. As we have demonstrated in our party and our participation in local government, significant minority representation will also characterize a Radical-led national government.

The Radicals' economic policy is based on the free market and Serbia 's potential as the key economy of the Danubian and west Balkan region. Eight years after the end of the rule of Slobodan Milosevic, there has yet to be a push for the restoration of communist-expropriated property. Our party will insist on redress and other overdue free-market reforms that will create more favorable conditions for foreign direct investment.

At the same time, we will vigorously pursue our mutual interests with Russia , as symbolized by Serbia 's participation in the South Stream pipeline project that will help assure Western Europe 's energy supplies.

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Far from representing Serbia's supposed rejection of the West in favor of Russia, we will maintain a healthy diversification of our commercial relations, including those with Russia — as have Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, and other EU and NATO members.

In building relations with all partners, East and West, the Radicals insist that Kosovo not be regarded as an exception to accepted norms of international behavior. Despite their professed intentions, the actions of some Western countries on Kosovo have not produced greater stability or ethnic peace and tolerance — in fact, the exact opposite.

The Radicals reject any recognition of Kosovo's illegal claim of separation from Serbia and the dispatch of an EU mission to Kosovo precisely because these actions violate the very standards the United States and Europe claim to uphold, values the Radical Party and virtually all Serbs share.

Instead of further aggravating the situation in Kosovo and creating conditions for violence on the ground — to which Serbia would be forced to respond to protect our citizens and our spiritual and cultural heritage, as any other country would — the Radicals invite the West to return to the path of negotiation, compromise and the rule of law. This is not some kind of retrograde "nationalism." It is simple common sense and common decency.

This is the basis on which a new Radical Party-led government will extend the hand of friendship to the United States and Europe . We will expect nothing less in return.

*Tomislav Nikolic is acting leader of the Serbian Radical Party and was a candidate for the Republic of Serbia 's presidency in 2008.*

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