

## **Political parties in Serbia**

Chapter for "Party politics in the Western Balkans", edited by Věra Stojarová and Peter Emerson.

### **Some aspects from Serbia's history and its political system<sup>1</sup>**

The contemporary political discussion in Serbia sometimes reads like a history book of Serbia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If one would not know personalities such as Dragoljub "Draža" Mihailović (Chetnik leader in WWII), Josip Broz "Tito" (partisan leader and then president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, SFRJ), Slobodan Milošević (Serbian and Yugoslav president in the 1990s), or Vojislav Šešelj (para-military leader in the 1990s), they might think that they are members of parliament, rather than the objects of schoolbooks. Indeed, the latest bloody episode of Serbia's history is so little distant that the two latest persons on this list do not only appear in history books, but were both still influential players in Serbia's party politics of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, to which this chapter mainly relates. Šešelj is still running for parliamentary elections, and would be an MP at time of writing, if he was not facing trial for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

#### ***The Serbian independence and democratisation***

In contrast to most other post-communist countries in Europe and as well most of its neighbours, the Serbian democracy is much younger. Full democratisation in Serbia dates to 2000, ten years later than the peak of the wave of post-communist democratisation in 1990. When the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia broke apart in 1990 and 1991, Serbia under the rule of Milošević steered towards a decade of nationalist ideology, aggression against its neighbours and internal minorities, and of an authoritarian system with elections that fall short of democratic standards. After four former Yugoslav Republic (Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) had declared independence, Serbia and Montenegro remained united in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, that was succeeded in 2004 by the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, before finally in 2006, both Serbia and Montenegro became independent states. However, both can be treated as fairly autonomous political system many years before. Certainly, Serbia and Montenegro each developed two fully autonomous party systems from the early 1990s, and while initially there were common direct elections to the federal assembly, the last such elections were held in 1997, when

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Daniel Zollinger for very valuable comments.

Serbian and Montenegrin politics definitively followed very different paths, mainly independent from each other. This legitimates the treatment of both Republics as quasi-independent entities.

### ***The new Serbian constitution of 2006***

Shortly after Montenegro split off and Serbia became an independent state in 2006, it gave itself its new constitution, replacing Milošević's constitution of 1990. While the new constitution introduces certain practices of good governance, such as the office of an ombudsman, abolishes the death penalty, and assures parliamentary control when the army is to be deployed abroad, other provisions are problematic with regards to the division of state powers or do not fit into the picture of a liberal state. Namely, there are drawbacks regarding the legislative control over the country's judicative, and the possibility of the central government to resolve municipal assemblies has been controversial (see for instance Venice Commission, 2007).<sup>2</sup> The International Crisis Group attests that the new constitution falls back behind its precedent in several aspects that are relevant for civic and minority rights. Serbia was defined as a nation state (while Milošević's constitution had defined Serbia as a civic state), and the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet mentioned as the only national language, despite numerous linguistic minorities living in the country. The preamble prescribed Kosovo as integral part of Serbia, so a recognition of Kosovo's independence would be anti-constitutional (International Crisis Group, 2006: 13-14). The expectations of the pro-European and non-nationalist parties to the constitution were widely disappointed. Namely, the Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka, DS) favoured a constitution with emphasis on greater decentralisation, namely with a restitution of autonomy to the Vojvodina province, and "liberal democratic values in a civic state" (International Crisis Group, 2006: 2). These points were opposed by the largest governing party at time, the Democratic Party of Serbia (Demokratska stranka Srbije, DSS), that attempted to master a large coalition in support of the new constitution, encompassing all relevant parliamentary parties, including the nationalist ones. "Koštunica [prime minister, DSS] used the preambular statement that Kosovo is a part of Serbia to force other parties to support the draft lest he accuse them publicly of insufficient loyalty at a time when the province is in danger of being lost" (International Crisis Group, 2006: 4). This helped him to gather support of the main opposition parties, the pro-European DS and the ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party (Srpska radikalna stranka, SRS), for the constitution, while opponents were branded as promoting Albanian separatism. Only the coalition around the Liberal-Democratic Party (Liberalno demokratska partija, LDP) along with a few minority parties was opposed to the new constitution and called for a boycott of the referendum,<sup>3</sup> but many registered voters stayed away from the polls. Allegedly, the turnout amounted to 55%, but according to reports of fraud and manipulation, real turnout was even

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance

<sup>3</sup> The vote would only be valid if more than half of the registered voters turn out.

below 50% (International Crisis Group, 2006), which would mean that the constitution would have failed. A new statute of autonomy for the Vojvodina region was still in discussion in autumn 2008. Like many democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, Serbia can be characterised as a semi-presidential system. This institutional order was introduced in 1990, but the powers of the state presidents varied widely. Namely in periods when the president's party was as well in control of the cabinet – mostly during the presidency of Milošević from 1990 to 1997<sup>4</sup> –, the role of the president was much more important (Orlović, 2005: 35). The main competences of the popularly elected president are foreign policy and defence. Under the new constitution, the president can veto laws, but the parliament can suspend his veto. Based on a governmental proposal, the president can dissolve parliament. Until 2006, the president could as well enact emergency legislation (Orlović, 2005).

Like other post-communist countries, dealing with the authoritarian past is an important political issue in Serbia after Milošević, and in this case, the responsibility of the regime for violation of rights towards its own people is mixed with war crimes abroad, and crimes against the internal ethnic minorities. Trials for political crimes committed in the authoritarian period were limited to the prosecutions by the ICTY, where among others the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije, SPS) Slobodan Milošević and the SRS leader Vojislav Šešelj stood trial. These were not accompanied by any prosecution for crimes not related to the wars. To the contrary, both party leaders kept their positions at the top of the SPS, respectively the SRS; – in the case of Milošević until his decease in 2006. Domestic courts opened trials only for a few acts of political violence. In sum, there was no lustration in Serbia, but rather personal continuity within the old regime parties.

Against the widespread impression, the political changes on 5 October 2000 were far from complete. Namely, key players at the head of the secret service and of the army could keep their posts under the DOS government. The head of the secret service stayed, on the insisting of the DSS, for four more months, and the head of the army for two years after October 2000, the Milošević fellows could keep these key positions for a possible lustration, with respects to the possible persecution of war crimes and political crimes. Namely, in this period the secret service was occupied with a massive destruction of documents.<sup>5</sup> With the Socialists' support for the first minority government of Vojislav Koštunica (DSS) in 2004, and their entry in a coalition with the DS in 2008, the main protagonists of the authoritarian 1990s returned soon to political power and their exponents to partly vulnerable positions in the Serbian state.

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<sup>4</sup> Milošević could not re-candidate in 1997, and instead became president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. His successor Milan Milutinović had less power, and his role became almost symbolic after in 2000 the democratically oriented parties took power of the parliament.

<sup>5</sup> TV B92, Insajder, 23 October 2008.

## ***Electoral systems at the national level***

While multiparty elections were held in Serbia and in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s, many civic liberties that are essential for a democratic functioning, were severely restricted, and elections were not considered free and fair. This changed only in 2000, when in the “bulldozer revolution” on 5 October, Milošević was forced, under the pressure of the street, and lacking support of the Serbian security forces, to acknowledge his electoral defeat and step back from power. This has brought a wave of liberalisation into the Serbian political system.

The electoral system applied for the elections of the Serbian parliament has remained mainly the same since 2000, except for the rules on ethnic minority representation. The parliament counts 250 seats, and is elected for a four-year-term by closed-list proportional representation with a D’Hondt formula in a unique national district with a 5% threshold (Jovanović, 2005). Unlike many other cases in post-communist Europe, Serbia does not differentiate the threshold for multi-party coalitions, so that the larger parties often gather a bunch of micro parties around itself in broad electoral coalitions. The Serbian party leadership has far-reaching power in determining the composition of the parliamentary group. Even if the parties present ranked (closed) candidate lists in the elections, their leadership can decide freely after the elections which candidates will receive mandates.<sup>6</sup>

The access of ethnic minorities to parliament was facilitated in 2007 by a major change of the electoral law: For the first time parties of national minorities (a term not precisely defined) did not need to pass the 5% threshold (Jovanović, 2005: 191). The move came in a period of international pressure on Serbia because of many anti-minority incidents. Moreover, in the 2003 elections, a broad coalition that consisted mostly of ethnic minority parties (Together for Tolerance/Zajedno za toleranciju, ZZT) failed to pass the 5% threshold, leaving minorities badly represented in parliament. The lifting of the threshold changed this. Whereas usually 10,000 signatures of eligible citizens were required to submit an electoral list, the electoral commission decreased this number for minority parties to 3,000, against the text of the electoral law.<sup>7</sup>

The Serbian president is elected in a two-round runoff system for a five-year term. In the first round, only candidates who win an absolute majority of the votes get elected. A minimal turnout requirement was dropped in 2004, after three elections in 2002 and 2003 had been declared invalid due to insufficient participation (OSCE ODIHR, 2004). Presidential elections are called by the Parliament Speaker. To register its candidate, a party needs to present the signatures of 10,000 supporters (1.5% of the electorate) to the Electoral Commission.

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<sup>6</sup> Adding to this, some parties oblige their MPs to hand in an undated letter of resign, allowing the party leadership to replace them with an other candidate at every time in the legislature, and indeed the practice of enforced replacements is practiced (Goati, 2006, p. 109).

<sup>7</sup> Danas, 16 November 2006, „Od danas – podizanje izbornih obrazaca“. The Supreme Court rejected a formal complaint against the lowering.

Election campaigns are partially state funded in Serbia. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, public funding amounted to 323m Serbian Dinars (around 4m Euros), with each electoral list receiving 3 million Dinar at the beginning of the campaign, and the major part of the funds allocated ex-post in relation to the number of seats won in the new parliament.<sup>8</sup> Other, private donations, vary however widely.

Ethnic Serbian voters in the UN-administered Kosovo can participate in the elections, whereas ethnic Albanian voters in Kosovo have been erased from the voter register, even if Serbia considers them as its own citizens. Albanians in Kosovo had always boycotted Serbian elections since the 1990s, and their boycott would have lowered turnout in presidential elections and in the constitution referendum below the 50% threshold.

## **The main dimensions of party orientation**

### ***The bulldozer revolution in 2000***

In party system development in post-communist democracies in Europe, two phases can be distinguished. The period from the first to the second election was often characterised by a complete change of the character of party competition (Bielasiak, 1997: 33; Bochsler, 2007; Olson, 1998). In the first multiparty elections in post-communist countries, usually very heterogeneous umbrella coalitions, uniting a broad alliance of reform-oriented parties, won a landslide victory against the old regime party. The most relevant question in such elections was usually the regime change, occasionally related to questions about the state borders. In the Serbian case, a broad alliance of reform parties (Democratic Opposition Serbia/Demokratska opozicija Srbije, DOS) won a landslide victory over the old regime parties in the first reasonably free parliamentary elections on 23 December 2000, following the *bulldozer revolution* earlier the same year. Not only in Serbia, but in all countries of the region, the umbrella movements soon broke up, leading to a party dispersion process with plenty new parties that competed independently, occupying each their specific location in the political space. This opens a second phase, the shakedown period, where the number of parties diminishes. Parties that did not find an electorate were abandoned by voters and politicians, or forced to merge with other parties.<sup>9</sup>

Mainly, there are four political conflicts which are addressed by political parties in Serbia and which seem relevant to voters in elections for the party choice. The four issue dimensions have been highly correlated in the party system.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> B92, 1 February 2007, "RIK dobio 14 izveštaja".

<sup>9</sup> For the shakedown hypothesis, see O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 58); Taagepera and Shugart (1989: 147) and Cox (1997). Dawisha and Deets (2006) and Bochsler (2007) investigated the hypothesis for countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>10</sup> See Pantić (2006); Slavujević (2006); Mihailović (2006); Goati (2004) for more information on party positioning.

The *regime conflict* regards the conflict between politicians close to the authoritarian Milošević regime versus the democratically oriented reform parties. More precisely, the SPS, and repeatedly the SRS have been the main pillars of the Milošević regime, while the pro-European reform parties (DS, Serbian Renewal Movement/Srpski pokret obnove, SPO), the nationalist-conservative parties (DSS and New Serbia/Nova Srbija, NS), and the parties of the ethnic minorities belonged to the DOS movement. The later emerged parties G17+ and LDP<sub>[s]</sub> have joined the reformer side of the political spectrum. The division is regularly put to the agenda when the reform parties commemorate important events in the public resistance against the regime, or by the few court cases regarding political violence committed during the authoritarian period.

*Nationalist-authoritarian values* are a second important dimension of Serbian politics. Namely, the attempts to create a Greater Serbia, the promotion of the Serbs as the dominant ethnic group, and authoritarian rejection of civic liberalism have been a position which has been highly salient on the Serbian political agenda in the 1990s, and been a priority both by the regime parties SPS and SRS, and likewise by parties of the democratic reformers, namely the SPO, while the DSS “oscillated between the nationalist and democratic opposition”, and the DS adopted a nationalist agenda in 1994-5 (Bieber, 2003: 75). The opposite view of Serbia as a non-nationalist civic-liberal state has been supported in most periods by the DS, but only the Civic Alliance of Serbia (Građanski Savez Srbije, GSS) has consequently defended this view throughout the 1990s. In the post-Milošević period, several issues related to the national question have dominated the agenda, namely the question how to deal with the past and how to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the relation to neighbouring states, human and minority rights, policies of non-discrimination, and the approval of a democratic system. Most parties belonging to the DOS movement take rather civic-liberal stands, with exception of DSS and the small NS, which both share rather nationalist positions, promote a strong relation of the state to the Serbian Orthodox Church, and can be characterised as nationalist-conservative (Đurković, 2007; Komšić, 2003: 48).

The nationalist-authoritarian issues are closely related to Serbian *foreign policies*, since the EU integration process (and to some extent cooperation with NATO) is conditioned on cooperation with ICTY and with civic rights. The most pronounced pro-European parties are the civic liberal ones, around the DS, along with G17+ and SPO. The DSS and NS have moved away from the project of Western integration when the DSS in 2007 joined a cooperation agreement with United Russia, the Russian party of power, spoken out against NATO membership, and when in 2008, both DSS and NS 2008 rejected the possibility of EU integration, after a majority of the EU member states has recognised Kosovo and the EU was to take over the UN mandate in Kosovo. The ultra-nationalist parties orient rather upon Moscow than Brussels, but the Radicals have struggled over

their position on this issue (see below), and the Socialists have taken more positive stands towards EU integration at their 2003 party congress.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the positioning on the *economic conflict* has been rather fuzzy. Clear protagonist of a strong role of the state in the economy is the SPS, along with a few minor parties that declare as Social Democrats, whereas G17+ favours radical liberal economic reforms. Other parties have less clear-cut positions: SRS, which declares to belong to the right spectrum of political parties, has increasingly campaigned for losers of the economic transition, promising price controls and an increase of the welfare state. The DS has rather a moderate position, neither clearly in the reform camp, nor promoting a strong welfare state, while the DSS has changed its position (see below).

In sum, the positioning of the parties on the four dimensions has been to a high extent correlated in the period after 2000. While the most reformist parties have (mainly) shared anti-nationalistic values, and been united in their opposition against the old regime, favoured EU integration and liberal economic reforms, the old regime parties took the opposed stands.

## Political parties in Serbia

Serbian party politics after 2000 has been dominated by two large and fairly polarised parties. On the one hand, there is the pro-European DS, which has been the main protagonist of the 2000 revolution and standing the prime minister from 2000-2004 and from 2008 on. On the other extreme, the SRS has over long periods been Serbia's largest party, replacing the Socialists as the main player of the old regime forces since 2003. Besides these two poles, the DSS could not only profit from the DS' electoral weakness in the parliamentary elections 2003, but as well over large periods hold the quite comfortable position of the kingmaker in the median of the political spectrum; none of the political option could for a majority without the DSS' support. This helped the DSS, even if increasingly losing votes, to lead coalition governments from 2004 until 2008.

Political parties in Serbia give wide powers to the party presidency, and in many cases, their powers have been more and more increased over time. In the case of the SRS, the party organs appear as fairly marginal compared to the extended presidential strength, including the interpretation of the party program and policy decisions, the nomination and dismissal of the general secretary and the four deputy presidents. Similarly, the president of the SPO, after the reform of the party statute in 1998, was empowered to nominate the party presidency and a third of the members of the party's executive committee. Exceptions are only the SPS and the G17+, whose presidents have mainly the role of the party coordinator and representative (Goati, 2004: 127-130).

The strong position of the party leadership emanates however not only from the parties' own statutes, that have but as well to the electoral system and the practiced system of resignation in the Serbian parliament. The party can decide on its own, and after the elections, on the composition of

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<sup>11</sup> Deklaracija šestog kongresa Socijalističke partije Srbije, 18 January 2003, Belgrade, <http://www.sps.org.yu/uploads/DEKLERACIJA%206%20KONGRESA.pdf>.

the parliamentary delegation. This does enable the party leaderships not only to nominate deputies that were not competing in the elections, and to punish disliked candidates. Furthermore, several parties ask their deputies for blank declarations of resignation, that they might use against the members of their parliamentary group, namely if they should decide to switch the party. Such practice is however better understandable, if accounting that party switches are very common in post-communist legislatures, and in Serbia too (Orlović, 2006: 110-114).

### ***Democratic Party (DS)***

After 1989, the Democratic Party was the first opposition party in Serbia, and until the Socialists' trajectory, leading to a formation of a common governmental coalition after the 2008 elections, the party was always one of the main opponents of the Socialists. The DS leader Zoran Đinđić was one of the most prominent figures of the Serbian opposition all over the 1990s, and the party one of the key player of the 2000 revolution and the single largest member of the DOS opposition coalition. After having served as prime minister since 2000, Đinđić was assassinated in office in March 2003, and became a symbol for the new liberal period afterwards, for democratic and economic reforms, and for leading Serbia towards the European Union.

Locating the DS solely at the anti-nationalist pole would be misleading; in certain periods in the 1990s, the party devoted its policy clearly to the national project of Greater Serbia, namely calling for a tearing up of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994 and 1995, and the creation of an independent Serbian Republic there (Goati, 2004: 41).

Đinđić's successor in party office Boris Tadić, was rather following a conciliating course of compromises with the national-conservative parties. This goes in line with the new role of the party in the institutional system. As of 2004, it held the presidential office with Boris Tadić, and needed first to cooperate with a government coalition lead by the nationalist-conservative DSS, and was later (2007-2008) included in a DSS-lead cabinet. In the period until 2007, prime minister Koštunica (DSS) was perceived to have substantial influence over Tadić. Examples for the appeasing course of the DS with the nationalists are the DS' approval for an important role of the Serbian Orthodox church in the state (Gajić, 2005), Tadić's only half-hearted excuses for Serbian mass crimes,<sup>12</sup> or his radical rhetoric on the Kosovo issue for the domestic public, namely a symbolic visit to the Kosovo Serbs in March 2005.<sup>13</sup> One of the possibly most painful flirts with the nationalists and the suspected opinion of the majority was the DS' support for the new Serbian constitution in the 2006 referendum.

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<sup>12</sup> His strategy relies on a recognition of Serbian war crimes, and excuses for such, but the common Serbian relativising that war crimes were committed by all former Yugoslav countries similarly (Danas, 7 December 2004, "Tadić: Svi jedni drugima dugujemo izvinjenje"). Commenting on an assembly that was aimed at denying the crimes committed in Srebrenica, Tadić stressed the freedom of opinion (Nin, 2 July 2005, Ljiljana Smajlović, "Srebrenica kao sudbina").

<sup>13</sup> When speaking to the Serbs in Kosovo and the international community, Tadić was apparently more moderate and sending certain signs of support of a multiethnic Kosovo. Namely, Tadić encouraged the Kosovo Serbs to participate in the 2004 parliamentary elections in Kosovo, and was trying to cool down emotions after the Kosovo riots in March 2004 (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2005)



In economic terms, DS favours liberal reforms, while promising socially egalitarian policies (Stojiljković, 2007a: 144-145). Under the leadership of Zoran Đinđić and the interim prime minister after the Đinđić murder, Zoran Živković, the willingness for fast reforms has been more pronounced than in the Tadić period. The party advocates civic rights and minority rights, and has expressed its willingness to support a strong autonomy for Vojvodina.

After 2006, the DS made several policy moves and created symbolic events in order to re-position itself as a pronounced pro-reformist force, and not to leave this field to the new entering LDP that positioned close to the DS with a more decided pro-reform direction. In the 2007 elections, the DS tried to attach to the legacy of Đinđić, calling for the renaming of a Belgrade boulevard after the murdered prime minister, and putting his widow Ružica Đinđić on top of its electoral list (although she did not enter the DS parliamentary delegation after the elections). In terms of its program, the DS emphasised its reform credibility through the nomination of Božidar Đelić as prime ministerial candidate, finance minister in the Đinđić government and is seen as being committed to drastic economic reforms.<sup>14</sup> The pro-European and reformist credentials of the DS were underlined by the visit of the EU enlargement commissar Oliver Rehn to president Boris Tadić in the last days of the campaign.

Differences within the DS-DSS coalition on the European question were a major issue in the campaign for the presidential elections 2008. Koštunica refused to support the candidature of Tadić, and despite the presidential elections were allegedly part of the DS-DSS coalition agreement, the DSS supported the minister of infrastructure Velimir Ilić in these elections (Bochsler, 2008b: 746). Shortly after Tadić was re-elected, and soon after the proclamation of Kosovo independence, the DS-DSS coalition broke over the question if the integration process should be continued. The nationalist-conservative parties, under the leadership of prime minister Koštunica tried to link the question of Kosovo independence with the Serbian foreign policy and the issue of EU integration. Accordingly, the nationalist-conservatives demanded for a stop to EU integration of Serbia and wanted to re-orient the Serbian foreign policy towards Russia, and Serbia redrew its ambassadors from all countries that recognised Kosovo. The DS, however, took clear position against international isolation and the stalling of the EU integration process. Against the votes of the nationalist-conservative ministers in the government, the pro-European cabinet majority decided to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, which lead the governing coalition break apart, provoking early elections in May 2008. The elections were mainly fought along the EU integration of Serbia, and won by a pro-European reform coalition around the DS, including G17+, SPO, and the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (Liga socialdemokrata Vojvodine, LSV). Since, the DS is back to government, forming a coalition with the Socialist Party (see below), under prime minister Mirko Cvetković (DS).

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<sup>14</sup> Nin, 16 November 2006: „Šta nudim Srbiji“.

The DS is a member of the Socialist International and an observer in the Party of European Socialists since 2006.

### ***Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP)***

With the Liberal-Democratic party, a new pro-reform player has emerged, five years after the start of Serbia's transition. The creation and positioning of the party can only be understood if looking at the large pro-reform party, the DS. The DS membership was always pronouncedly pro-European and pro-reform, but as one of the largest party, it was after 2000 in several periods in different roles in governmental responsibility, and was partly behaving pragmatically. After the Đinđić murder, the circle of persons around Đinđić was replaced by different party streams, Boris Tadić became party president in February 2004, and the DS moved towards a pragmatic cooperation with the DSS. This grew dissatisfaction in the most reformist wing of the party. On the 2004 DS party congress, Čedomir Jovanović, deputy prime minister in the interim government in 2003, attacked the DS leadership for the cooperation with prime minister Koštunica, whom he intitled the "new Milošević". In the aftermath, a group around Jovanović tried to form the Liberal-Democratic Fraction inside the DS. The DS, however, excluded Jovanović for this attempt (cf. Goati, 2006: 172), and he in turn founded the new LDP on 5 November 2005.

The party attempts to be seen as the only guarantee for a continuation of the Đinđić reform program, accusing the DS that it stalled its pro-European reform program. Accordingly, reforms and change is the first priority in the party program,<sup>15</sup> and a solution to the *questions of The Hague and Kosovo* – problems inherited from the Milošević regime – figure among the first points on this way of reforms and European integration. The party argues that Serbia needs to face its recent past, and deal with war crimes committed in the 1990s, as a basis of societal modernisation. Issues such as lustration, human rights, autonomy for multi-cultural regions, and Western integration (into EU, NATO, but as well through increased cooperation with neighbouring states) take an important place in the program. With regards to economic issues, the party takes clearly liberal-conservative stands, and wants to reduce the size of the government. The party favours an acceleration of the transition, increased efforts in privatisation, the transfer of state regulatory activities on independent, market-oriented regulatory bodies, and the abolishment of state-controlled prices, which should lead to economic growth and reduce poverty. With regards to social welfare, the party favours a reform of the Serbian education system, wants to replace the state-controlled health care with a mandatory health insurance, and under the title "social policies", the program speaks of equal chances instead of criminal networks, client-orientation, increased quality, efficacy and instead of linear social subsidies. For the fight against poverty, the party does not list redistributive programs, but rather accuses feudal attitudes in government positions, and "fascist, racist, and xenophobe tendencies" to exclude parts of the population from social and economic life.

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<sup>15</sup> Program "Drugačija Srbija" (Different Serbia), from 2007. Found on [www.ldp.org.yu](http://www.ldp.org.yu) [last accessed on 16 June 2008].

The new party takes positions close, but more radical than the DS, and accuses the DS of a program which is too compromising. The DS leader Tadić in turn said that the LDP was not acceptable as a coalition partner, because it would accept Kosovo's independence. While this might partly be understood as a reassuring act of the DS' clear position against Kosovo independence, this rejection was as well needed in order to signal that the LDP had no chances to get into any governing coalition. Since 2008, the party is member of the European Liberal, Democratic and Reformist Group.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and New Serbia (NS)***

The Democratic Party of Serbia of Vojislav Koštunica has been brought to life in 1992, when it split from the DS, due to disagreements about the alliance strategies, and mainly due political differences in nationalist questions. The party wanted a new drawing of the state borders according to the ethnic principle, or differently expressed it supported the Greater Serbia project, based on the idea that Serbia is everywhere where Serbians live.<sup>17</sup> This means as well that it opposed the peace treaties of Dayton and Erdut that Slobodan Milošević agreed in, ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, not wanting to recognise the new state borders (Goati, 2004: 43). In the period of 2000 to 2007, the DSS used a much more conciliating rhetoric towards neighbouring states and internal minorities. The DSS remained sceptical about cooperation with the ICTY, but its position was fairly oscillating. Koštunica, now in the position of the president of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (2000-2003), vetoed the extradition of Slobodan Milošević, that then happened against his will, provoked a state crisis, and initiated the DSS escape from the DOS movement in 2001 (Goati, 2004: 196). While Koštunica repeatedly blamed the ICTY as an anti-Serbian institution, after taking the office of the prime minister (heading two governments in 2004-2007 and 2007-2008), he officially declared the willingness of the government for cooperation. The record has however been rather mixed, and the EU accession stalled, due to the official incapability (or rather the supposed unwillingness) to extradite the highest-ranked accused war leaders. The DSS did as well continue its clerically policy towards the Serbian Orthodox church. DSS has a tradition as a right-wing party representing the interests of an economic elite, but due to a structural change of the party electorate, the economic direction changed after 2000 (Goati, 2004: 208-209).

The DSS membership before these changes could be best characterised as a nationalist intellectual and economic elite, and it did not heavily change before the democratic period after 2000, when the party became more successful in elections, and it could address a wider public. The DSS is an associate member of the European People's Party since 2005.<sup>18</sup>

Since 2007, the DSS competes jointly with the New Serbia (Nova Srbija, NS) party of Velimir Ilić in national elections. The New Serbia party is strong in a few localities, and its foremost local

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<sup>16</sup> B92, 30 October 2008, „LDP primljen među evropske liberale“.

<sup>17</sup> DSS program 1998, p. 6, cited in Goati (2004: 44).

<sup>18</sup> Information on the affiliation with Europea political parties is taken from Milivojević (2007: 115).

stronghold is Ilić's hometown Čačak in Southern Serbia. While before 2006, the party was characterised as having a position similar to the SPO (Goati, 2006), and indeed it was in coalition with SPO at time, it has moved since towards more conservative and nationalist points of view. New Serbia is usually politically on the side of Vojislav Koštunica, although using more radical rhetoric.

In 2008, DSS and NS formed a joint electoral list together with the United Serbia party (Jedinstvena Srbija, JS), a splinter group from an ultra-nationalist party that had been founded by Željko Ražnjatović, a prominent war criminal.

## **G17+**

G17+ was formed as a party in 2002, originating from an economic think-tank with the same name that had been politically close to the parties of the DOS movement. Its first party president Mirosljub Labus was a former DS member. G17+ has the profile of a liberal political party (Vujačić, 2007: 167-168), with a strong accent on economic reforms and development, market liberalisation, and favouring budget austerity and tax cuts over a generous welfare state.

The party clearly locates at the liberal and anti-nationalist pole, speaking out for a strengthening of civic rights, regardless of the ethnicity, and stressing the EU membership process as the foremost important goal of Serbian politics. The party has been positive about Montenegro gaining independence from Serbia, arguing that in the confederation of Serbia and Montenegro, the small confederate had political power that was much wider than its importance in terms of economic power and of fiscal contributions to the common institutions.<sup>19</sup> It is an associate member of the European People's Party since 2005.

G17+ has been in government constantly after its first appearance in national parliamentary elections in 2003, first as part of both Koštunica cabinets, and then in 2008 competing on a joint list with the DS. The party provoked a break-up of the first Koštunica cabinet in autumn 2006, over its disappointment about the stalled EU integration process. The EU had suspended negotiations over a Stabilisation and Association Agreement following the Serbian authorities' failure to arrest the fugitive ex-General Ratko Mladić in order to hand him over to the Hague Tribunal. The fiasco of the EU integration process irritated G17+, which left the government in September 2006, and thus deprived Koštunica's cabinet of its majority, leading to early parliamentary elections in January 2007. Nevertheless, the party agreed in joining a new coalition with Koštunica as prime minister, this time however with participation of the DS, that is closer to G17+ in many aspects.

## ***Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO)***

The Serbian Renewal Movement is arguably the most flexible party in unifying a Serbian nationalist background with pronouncedly pro-European and anti-chauvinist program under the

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<sup>19</sup> Program, G17+, 28. mart 2004. Available at <http://www.g17plus.org.yu/download/dokumenti/program.pdf> (last accessed on 26 October 2008).

same roof. Although it occupies conservative ideological territory in many questions, advocating the return of Serbia to a monarchy and orthodox clericalism, in the most important political questions, the SPO nowadays allies with the most liberal and pro-European positions, and in its 2001 program, it has accepted the territorial reality of Serbia's border, and the defeat of the Greater Serbia idea.

The party was founded in 1990 as an extreme nationalist, revisionist and anti-communist force, defining itself as a party of all Serbs, applying a similarly ethnically exclusive concept for the definition of the Serbian state, and using insulting language for ethnic minorities.<sup>20</sup> The party pursued a policy of Greater Serbia, stating that

“no piece of land drenched in Serbian blood and marked with Serbian churches and graves can be detached or confederated. No one can separate from Yugoslavia the territories which on the day when Yugoslavia was created in 1918 were part of the Kingdom of Serbia, or from the territories where Serbs were in a majority before the genocide carried out by the Croatian Ustashi”.<sup>21</sup>

In this time, the later founder of the Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj, was shortly a founding member of SPO. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the party oriented historically upon the Serbian Chetniks, the royalist and nationalist Serbian militia in WWII. Twice, the party recruited its own para-military force, the White Eagles (Beli Orlovi) in 1990 and the Serbian Guard (Srpska Garda) in 1991 (NIOD 2002). After 1992, and until 1997, as well as after 2000, the party is told to have taken a pro-Western position (Goati, 2004: 47).

The party is mainly oriented upon Vuk Drašković, party president since the foundation of the SPO, and who served as foreign minister of Serbia and Montenegro, and later of Serbia, from 2004 to 2007. He is a well-known figure, due to his role in the democracy movements of the 1990s and his role in the pro-democracy protests. However, in the role, the party was rather volatile. In 1997, right after the student protests, the party sought to enter a coalition with Milošević, and finally it did so in 1999 (Bieber, 2003), shortly followed by assassination attempts of the regime on Drašković in 1999 and 2000, after which the party switched back to the anti-regime camp, but it did not support officially the 2000 pro-democracy protest movement, although its supporters were present in the protests. Given the vacillating party history, the SPO's absence might have possibly rather strengthened than weakened the credibility of the Democratic Opposition movement in 2000.

### ***Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Serbian Progress Party (SNS)***

In the 1990s, the Serbian Radical Party was pushing for a more aggressive confrontation of the Serbian state and the Yugoslav army against its neighbours and against its internal minorities, not only in politics but as well on the battlefield. Party leader Vojislav Šešelj ran in parallel the para-military Serbian Chetnik Movement (Srpski Četnički Pokret, SČP), organising ethnic cleansing,

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<sup>20</sup> The party program and further information on the party was found on [www.spo.rs](http://www.spo.rs), last accessed on 29 October 2008; more information was retrieved in Goati (2004: 47-48), Komšić (2002), and Vukomanović (2007).

<sup>21</sup> Velika Srbija (A Greater Serbia), July 1990, no. 1, p. 18 (cited in Tomic, 2008: 80).

persecutions, and deportations in Croatia, Bosnia, and in Vojvodina and the spread of hatred (ICTY 2004: 2), among others calling for Croats residing in Vojvodina having their eyes gouged out with rusty spoons. Repeatedly, the Serbian Radicals were criticising Milošević for not contributing enough to the war for Greater Serbia. In the party's programme, Greater Serbia is described as including regions in neighbouring countries such as "Serbian Macedonia, Serbian Montenegro, Serbian Bosnia, Serbian Herzegovina, the Serbian town of Dubrovnik, Serbian Dalmatia, Serbian Lika, Serbian Kordun, Serbian Banija, Serbian Slavonia, and Serbian Baranja", often as well referred as the *Virovitica-Karlovac-Karlobag* line.<sup>22</sup>

After the end of the war and the changes of 2000, the party has not changed its goal of Greater Serbia. In 2003, Šešelj surrendered to the ICTY, accused for war crimes, while the party officials in Belgrade have rather focussed on different policy fields and tried to get more acceptable to the Serbian voters and to the international community, that continues its embargo on all contacts with SRS officials at all levels.<sup>23</sup> The deputy party leader Tomislav Nikolić, now leading party manager, has rather tried to position the Radicals as a conservative European party, trying to imitate the metamorphosis of other formerly fascist or ultra-nationalist parties such as the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN) in Italy, or the Croatian Democratic Movement (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica, HDZ), both now accepted parties on the European floor. But success of this strategy is not quite visible, either because the party is stuck deeper in the brown mire than its Croat counterpart, or because the party is commanded by its war-lord Šešelj, although now from the prison cell of the ICTY in the Netherlands. Šešelj does not only continue to be a present personality in the political debate in Serbia, through his mainly political defence in the Hague Court, and through his sporadic orders that reach his party back in Belgrade. Important events created by Šešelj were for instance his hunger strike, opening the SRS campaign for the 2007 parliamentary elections. In December 2006 Šešelj published his "political testament", advising his party to oppose the integration into EU and NATO, and to re-open territorial questions of Greater Serbia.<sup>24</sup>

Nikolić set an accent on social and economic issues. The party campaigned increasingly for losers of the economic transition. In the presidential electoral campaign in 2008, Nikolić as Radical candidate and other party members dropped the Šešelj badge, that they used always to wear in public, and tried to appeal to voters presenting himself with the promise of change and of to fighting against criminality and the rampant corruption in Serbia. This, however, sounds irritating, since his party is seen to stand close to the Serbian organised criminality, including to the assassins of Đinđić (and the party is expected that it would grant an amnesty to them, if it were to get such power).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Programme published in *Velika Srbija*, the organ of the Serbian Chetnik Movement, in July 1990, no. 1, pp. 2-3 (cited in Tomic, 2008: 81).

<sup>23</sup> Spoerri (2008) discusses the boycott against the SRS and SPS.

<sup>24</sup> B92, 4 December 2006, "O Šešeljevom testamentu".

<sup>25</sup> *Politika*, 15 January 2008, "Svim srcem, ali bez Šešeljevog bedža"; *Politika*, 24 January 2008, "I Nikolić putuje u Rusiju"-

In electoral terms, the party could quickly recover from its losses in 2000, when it dropped to 8.8% of the votes, and emerge back as the largest Serbian party with up to 29% of votes in 2007 and 2008. The SRS is highly successful in areas with an ethnically mixed population, where nationalist issues are much more salient among ethnic Serbian voters. Namely, the party scores well in Kosovo and in multi-ethnic Vojvodina, and the cliché is that the party heavily profits from the voters of refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo, that have settled there by Slobodan Milošević, in order to change the ethnic relations of the region and reinforce the ethnic Serbian dominance.<sup>26</sup>

On the internal floor, the Radicals could not get back to government – and they repeatedly ruled out their interest of forming a coalition government –, but nevertheless were not an inch away from a come-back in 2007, when in a tactical move, the DSS backed the election of SRS deputy president Tomislav Nikolić as parliament speaker in the summer 2007. This was understood as a threat of a possible formation of a DSS-SRS cabinet, provoking a domestic and international outcry. The SRS cooperates, however, with almost all Serbian parties at the local level for the formation of coalitions in 63 out of the 144 Serbian municipalities; the most frequent partners are SPS and DSS, while DS-SRS coalitions are rare.<sup>27</sup>

The Radicals have lately suffered two quite relevant split-offs by members who are disappointed by their failed attempt to convert the party into an acceptable conservative party. On the one hand, after in 2004 the SRS won with the mayor office in Novi Sad with Maja Gojković, one of the largest towns in Serbia, and certainly the most important public office that the SRS had in the post-2000 period, Gojković has quit the party, later run founded the People's Party (Narodna Partija), and allied with the DSS and NS. Only shortly after the 2008 national parliamentary elections, the SRS was hit by a further exodus, when the party's deputy president Tomislav Nikolić and the general secretary of the party, Aleksandar Vučić, stepped back from their offices, left the Radicals along with 18 other Radical MPs,<sup>28</sup> and formed the new Serbian Progress Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka, SNS). The split of the SNS has been provoked by Šešelj's intervention in 2008, after the Tomislav Nikolić had negotiated with the DS-led government, in order to pass legislation that would allow to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. The agreement of the Radicals with the government has been celebrated not only as a breakthrough in the internal blockade of Serbian politics (the SRS had blocked parliamentary work through the use of formal objections in procedural issues and through motions for urgent debates, imitating filibusters in the US senate), but as well as a first step for the rehabilitation of the Radicals. But the plan was recalled by Šešelj, who vetoed any agreement with the DS-lead government, resulting in the internal tear-up of the party.

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<sup>26</sup> Stefanović (2008) shows some support for the ethnic hypothesis (however, his results do not really show the expected curvilinear pattern of ethnic minorities and SRS vote share), but his results support the rumour about the refugees only in certain elections, while in other cases, no such effect is visible.

<sup>27</sup> Figures for the period 2004-2008, provided by CeSID Niš, "Koaliciona moc SRS-a na lokalnu".

<sup>28</sup> Politika, 2 October 2008, "Paralelna stvarnost srpske skupštine".

Usually, party split-offs are hindered through the practice of undated announcements of resign, but in this case, it was Nikolić who controlled these documents, and alleged that he lost them. Once more, in this case, it is to the advantage of Nikolić that he can count on the support of the parliamentary majority, if there should be a conflict about the mandates of the split-off deputies.

With the move of the DSS-NS coalition towards a pronounced nationalist position, the Novi Sad ex-mayor Maja Gojković's People's Party, the SNS and the SRS, there is a strong competition for the nationalist voters in Serbia, and if they should not increase in votes, some of the parties will hardly pass the 5% threshold autonomously. In its first test, the repeated local elections in four municipalities on 9 November 2008, the SNS became the second largest party, behind the DS, in three out of four municipalities. The SRS was devastated, failing to pass the threshold in two out of four municipalities, and losing most of its mandates in the two other ones, including one of its foremost strongholds, Ruma. Upcoming elections might help to order the powers in the nationalist field newly. At time of writing, it appears plausible that DSS-NS, the People's Party, and the SNS will agree in a political cooperation.<sup>29</sup> The international community would be relieved if the new nationalist parties would win on the extent of the Serbian Radicals, and has shown this clearly, for instance with the symbolic attendance of the SNS founding congress, while continuing to avoid all contacts with the SRS.

### ***Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)***

The Socialist Party of Serbia has a long legacy, being the successor of the Union of Communists in Serbia (Savez Komunističke Srbije). It re-named in 1990, but stayed under the leadership of the previous secretary of the Serbian communists, Slobodan Milošević. The party was not only the main force of the economic left in Serbia, it mainly got known in the 1990s for its authoritarian and nationalist policies. After 1991, the party started to advocate a Greater Serbia,<sup>30</sup> and in the program of 1992, it called the Northern-Atlantic and European institutions, EU, OSCE, NATO, imperialist organisations and enemies of Serbia (Vykouřilová & Stojarová, 2007). The Socialists rejected any autonomy for Vojvodina and Kosovo (in the 1996 program), and the minority-friendly program points existed only on paper, but did not have an impact on the implemented policies (Goati, 2004: 50-51). With this program of international isolation, hatred, and authoritarianism the SPS' popularity dropped, and in the reasonably free and fair elections of December 2000, the party could not any more substitute popularity with electoral fraud.<sup>31</sup>

The first few elections after the liberalisation of the regime have been difficult for almost all former communist parties, who could neither attract many voters, nor enter any coalition. Having lost their political monopoly, they are often discredited for substantial parts of the electorate. The *old regime*

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<sup>29</sup> Politika, 27 October 2008, "Desni centar sa dvojcem bez kormilara"; B92, 21 October 2008, "Gojkovićeva s liderima DSS-a i NS-a".

<sup>30</sup> In the 1993-1997 period, when Slobodan Milošević was a central figure in the international peace negotiations for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the party position on Greater Serbia was more nuanced.

<sup>31</sup> For details, see Todorović (2002).



*conflict* still overwhelms, and with very few exceptions, the elections are won in a landslide victory by the reform parties, which usually compete in a broad umbrella coalition (Bochsler, 2007; Olson, 1998). The situation in Serbia was not different, where in the first reasonably free elections in 2000, the Socialists fell back to some 14% of the votes, and in later elections, they just passed the 5% threshold for the entry in parliament.

The nationalist program of the Socialist party did not pay out after 2000, in terms of votes. The issue might have lost salience, since everyday economic problems have gained a higher priority to many citizens, and most importantly, the Socialists do not own the nationalist issue as their own. For authoritarian-nationalist voters, the Serbian Radical Party offers the more credible alternative to the Socialists, and even more they have become more and more similar on most other issues too, including the demand for a strong welfare state. By 2008, the space at the authoritarian end of the political axis got increasingly close, given an accentuation of the nationalist aspects of the program of prime minister Koštunica's coalition of DSS and NS. The lack of ownership of the Socialist Party on nationalist issues was further reflected by the relationship to Milošević. He, and his fellow prisoner Šešelj were promoting in their televised defences a Serbian nationalist view of recent history while standing trial at ICTY, and accordingly, they could even increase their symbolic importance for the nationalists back home. However, while the Radical leader Šešelj stayed in close contact with his SRS, regularly giving orders about the programmatic direction of the party, the same could not be said about the Socialist leader Slobodan Milošević, who in the 2004 presidential elections even supported a Radical, instead of the own SPS candidate.<sup>32</sup> The Radicals thus increasingly became the only dominant party which could represent the hardcore nationalist vote.

This difficult electoral position, and an uncertain future development of its support, might have encouraged the party leadership to readjust its position after the decease of Milošević in March 2006, but most importantly around the parliamentary elections in 2008. The party attempted to re-position and to cut (to some extent) the ties to its past, in order to address new segments of voters, but as well in order to become a possible coalition partner for the pro-Europeans. This, however, means that they can play the role of the pivotal voter in the national parliament as in local assemblies all across Serbia, since they are acceptable as coalition partner both to the pro-Europeans around the DS, and to the nationalists around the DSS and SRS. This gives the party much more power in coalition negotiations. The main accent of the SPS' new direction was a new accent on social welfare policies, and while it previously had a rather ambivalent view on the EU integration process of Serbia, it approved now the EU perspective clearly. Already on its party congress in 2003, the party had switched its position with regards to the European Union,<sup>33</sup> a position re-confirmed three years later at the congress of December 2006. There, ahead of the 2007 elections, the Socialists were stressing their new social orientation, putting an accent on economic

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<sup>32</sup> Vreme, 7.12.2006: "Izborna Kampanja: Dvojci i Kormilari".

<sup>33</sup> Deklaracija šestog kongresa Socijalističke partije Srbije, 18 January 2003, Belgrade, <http://www.sps.org.yu/uploads/DEKLERACIJA%206%20KONGRESA.pdf>.

policies of an extension of the welfare state. The SPS repeatedly declared to be the only relevant left-wing party in Serbia, apparently pointing at its left-wing economic program. The party promised to reintroduce the social welfare system of the early 1990s. It spoke out in favour of a regulation of the market, mixed property structure, full employment. More specifically, it bases its economic and welfare policies on the importance of collective employment agreements and on participation of employees at their workplaces. It speaks of a better, just and human society and democratic socialism (Stojiljković, 2007b: 189). Apart from that, the party did not campaign any more on nationalist issues. Still, the party is negative towards cooperation with NATO, but it stepped back from its firm rejection in the 1990s, and stated in 2006 that it would accept the people's verdict in this question.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly, for the electorate of the SPS, the new orientation is a major rupture – and the party risks to lose parts of its voters on the way to its new pro-European identity. However, and most importantly, the party could bring in the strengthening of social redistribution as one of the main pillars into the coalition agreement, and make “social justice” one of the most frequently used words in Serbian politics. This label positions the SPS in the public perception as the issue-leader in favour of a strong social welfare state. Welfare policies are very popular with many Serbian citizens, who are still used a state that takes care of citizens “from the cradle to the grave” (Stojiljković, 2007a: 135).

In the new program of 2006, the Socialist Party writes that its goal is the membership in the Socialist International (SI).<sup>35</sup> It has, however, so far being refused a membership in the SI, due to the party's historical legacies, the enduring link to Slobodan Milošević and the lack of reform (Stojiljković, 2007a: 132-133). The SI has been reluctant to accept members with a nationalist-authoritarian program, so that a few parties with such a direction could only become SI member through mergers with other Social Democratic parties, with whom they shared some economic stands. In the Serbian case, there is further a strong competition for the label of being *the* Social Democratic party. Besides several small Social Democratic parties (see below), the Democratic Party of Boris Tadić attempts to position as well in this field, and it is as well member of the SI.

For the SPS, one of the latest steps towards an SI membership and democratic reconciliation at time of writing was fulfilled on 18 October 2008, when the DS leader Boris Tadić and the SPS leader Ivica Dačić signed an agreement of reconciliation, declaring that they wanted to settle their former conflict, which can be see as a rehabilitation of the Serbian Socialists.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Programska deklaracija sedmog kongresa Socijalističke partije Srbije, 3 December 2006, Belgrade, [http://www.sps.org.yu/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogsection&id=5&Itemid=77](http://www.sps.org.yu/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=5&Itemid=77)

<sup>35</sup> Programska deklaracija sedmog kongresa Socijalističke partije Srbije, 3 December 2006, Belgrade, [http://www.sps.org.yu/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogsection&id=5&Itemid=77](http://www.sps.org.yu/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=5&Itemid=77)

<sup>36</sup> "Deklaracija o političkom pomirenju i zajedničkoj odgovornosti za ostvarivanje vizije Srbije kao demokratske, slobodne, celovite, ekonomski i kulturno razvijene i socijalno pravedne zemlje", *Politika*, 21 and 22 October 2008.

## ***The Social Democratic Party family***

Several parties aspire to hold the place of the Social Democratic party in Serbia. There are a few parties which are not only calling themselves Social Democrats, but also being oriented upon the Western European model of Social Democrats, with civic-liberal values and a social-redistributive program. The most important party in this field is the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska partija, SDP), which is an SI member. But these parties fall short of votes; none of these parties is able pass the electoral threshold on its own, or as the leader of a party coalition. Apart from these parties, the Social Democratic space is occupied by the DS, another SI member. Finally, several regional Vojvodina parties, the most important among them being the LSV, locate themselves in the Social Democratic realm (cf. Bochsler, 2008a).

## ***Administrative obstacles and the failure of the Movement of Serbian Force (PSS)***

Many party systems in Central and Eastern Europe saw the emergence of new parties that quickly won a very considerable amount of votes, and could often get into the governments already after their first electoral appearance; from Res Publica in Estonia, over New Era in Latvia, New Union (Social Liberals) and the National Resurrection Party in Lithuania, up to Bulgaria, with the National Movement of Simeon II or the Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria (Sikk, 2006; Taagepera, 2006). Differently from Western Europe, these parties do not mobilise around newly emerging social-political divides, such as the post-materialist conflict or anti-immigration or regional issues (Harmel & Robertson, 1985; Meguid, 2005). As Sikk (2006) showed, these new parties in Central and Eastern Europe much more often choose a position in the centre of the pre-existing party system; – a strategy that in the West might be possibly best compared to Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia. They campaign with newness as their main issue and project, which makes them presumably highly successful at voters who are generally disappointed by the old parties, without having major political differences to them. (Needless to say that in the subsequent elections the voters will switch again to an other party or abstain.) The success of new parties however depends a lot on their financial resources, and on the resources that the old parties use in order to hinder the entry of new competitors that get dangerous to them.

Serbia as well had its case of a centrist new political party, the Movement of the Serbian Force (Pokret snage Srbije, PSS). Not only the party name alluded to Forza Italia, similar to the Italian case, the party functioned similar to an enterprise of the Serbian oligarch and media tycoon Bogoljub Karić. The PSS became parliamentary in 2005 when Karić allegedly payed MPs of other parties to join his parliamentary group.<sup>37</sup> In its campaigns, PSS could call upon Karić's own TV station, one of the most popular in Serbia at time. With its appeals to national proud, a combination

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<sup>37</sup> Danas, 20 May 2005, "Aligrudić: Juče bio crn dan", "Pokret Snaga Srbije očekuje nove poslanike".

of a program of economic development and protectionism<sup>38</sup>, and a nationalist-conservative position, similar to the median voter in Serbia, the party was probably closest and the most dangerous to the DSS. Survey results by Stojiljković (Stojiljković, 2007b) suggest that the PSS electorate is deluded by the institutions, but does not prefer policies that are very different from the electorate of the ‘old’ parties. In local elections, the PSS was highly successful, and in the first round of the presidential elections in 2004, Karić won 18.2% of the votes, just behind the Radical and the Democratic candidates, Nikolić and Tadić.

The Serbian case is however not only a schoolbook example for the popularity of a new centrist party that heavily drew from its own financial capacities, but as well for the barriers that were put up by the old parties, intimidated by the political success of the newcomer, and trying to hinder its uprising. While the comparative literature mainly mentions means of the party and electoral legislation that are used by the old parties in order to conserve their political power – party registration rules, high legal thresholds in elections, or a party financing that is little favourable to newcomers –, in the Serbian case the PSS’ ascent was stopped all at once, when in 2006 the Serbian authorities smashed Karić’s financial and media empire on criminal charges and withdrew the frequency of his TV station. The motives of this move will possibly never be undoubtedly clear, but many observer saw this as an action to prevent Karić’s political career before he could make a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections in 2007. Karić fled the country and with him went the PSS’s chances, despite its spending more private funding than any other party on the election campaign.

## **Conclusion and outlook**

Eight years after 5 October 2000, the Serbian party system is still in a process of consolidation. The main motor of European integration, the Democratic Party (DS) has returned to power as the largest political party and dominant force of the pro-reform wing, similar to the situation after 2000. However, following a re-shuffle of the party landscape, with the entry of the new pro-European parties G17+ and LDP, with the move of the DSS back to its nationalist roots, and with the trajectory of the Socialist Party, the sharp division into *old regime parties* and *pro-European reformers* has been broken up. The leadership in the nationalist part of the spectrum will however, after the split of the Serbian Radicals and the programmatic change of the DSS, be determined in upcoming elections.

Different to other countries in post-communist Europe, the emergence of a new, centre-oriented anti-establishment party has so far been hindered, not at least through the usage of administrative resources against the leader of such a party, the Serbian oligarch Bogoljub Karić. This, however, does not eliminate the electoral potential for other new parties to campaign on state mismanagement and on governmental failure. The strong polarisation and the pronounced programmatic differences of Serbian parties along four major political divisions – old regime versus reform parties,

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<sup>38</sup> The party program is presented in Stojiljković (2007a: 143).

authoritarian-nationalist versus civic liberal values, foreign policy, and social-economic issues – might make it more difficult than in other post-communist countries rather difficult for catch-all parties to attract a wide electorate with a fuzzy centrist program.

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