
EMERGENCE OF ONE OPPOSITION BLOC IN SERBIA SPURS ANOTHER

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Serbias Free Citizens Movement, PSG, may become the focal point of a new liberal opposition bloc, the second such consolidation of parties opposed to the ruling Progressives, Serbian media report.

PSG leader and former Ombudsman Sasa Jankovic has indicated the party is considering bringing together other parties unwilling to join the opposition Alliance for Serbia bloc, which is showing signs of shifting to the right.

A number of Serbian dailies have reported that the effort is well under way.

Among possible partners, reports have identified the Social Democratic Party of former Serbian President Boris Tadic and the Lets Not Drown Belgrade initiative that began as a protest movement against the governments controversial Belgrade Waterfront development.

Analysts say such developments will help tackle the fragmented nature of Serbias opposition scene, but opinion is split on whether they can really mount a challenge to the ruling Progressives of President Aleksandar Vucic.

I cant see how either of them can threaten Vucics lead, said Boban Stojanovic, an assistant lecturer at the Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences. He predicted the blocs would simply vie over the same voters without drawing support away from Vucic.

There will probably be a struggle for votes, he said.

But political analyst Cvijetin Milivojevic said the existence of two distinct blocs, one more conservative, the other liberal, would bring out voters who might otherwise stay away from the polls.

This sort of coming together will encourage voters who wanted to opt for an opposition option in the previous elections, Milivojevic told BIRN.

New bloc logical

A second bloc has been rumoured ever since the PSG turned down the Alliance in objection to its embrace of the far-right Dveri Movement.

The Alliance is the brainchild of former Belgrade mayor Dragan Djilas. Its nucleus was moderate,

but it has since reached out to the likes of Dveri and the conservative Democratic Party of Serbia and drafted a programme that takes a hard line on the issue of Serbia's former Kosovo province.

On August 7, Jankovic told a press conference: We will rally around a clear political idea and programme. But he gave no details.

Let's cross that bridge when we get to it, he said.

BIRN asked the Free Citizens' Movement whether it had held talks with other organisations, but the party only responded by citing Jankovic's pledge to work on creating an alliance.

The Let's Not Drown Belgrade movement said meanwhile that it would not be joining forces with political parties.

The Social Democratic Party did not answer BIRN's inquiry by the time of publication.

Milivojevic said the emergence of two distinct blocs would help consolidate the votes that were otherwise scattered between various opposition parties in this year's local elections in Belgrade, won convincingly by the Progressives. The once-mighty Democratic Party failed to cross the threshold.

But Stojanovic said he was doubtful that a bloc centred on the PSG and Tadic's Social Democrats could pass the five per cent threshold to enter parliament at the next general election due in 2020. Opposition-minded voters may choose to back the Alliance instead, believing it has a better chance against Vucic.

There is the question of the motivation of voters – will they vote for someone who is struggling to cross the threshold or will they play it safe, even if the Alliance for Serbia is not that close to them (in terms of policy).

I'm afraid of a scenario in which the liberal bloc falls short, like the Democratic Party did in Belgrade, he said.

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