Elected Serbian MP Speaks: No Color Revolution, No Russia Sanctions | Dr. Dejan Šoškić

Former Serbian central bank governor Dejan Šoškić joins Pascal to discuss the Student List's electoral victory and Serbia's political transition. He explains the movement's origins, democratic organization, funding, and priorities for restoring institutions, while challenging claims of a foreign orchestrated color revolution. The conversation explores corruption, the Novi Sad tragedy, government formation, Kosovo, military neutrality, and opposition to sanctions against Russia. Šoškić also considers relations with the European Union and the challenges of turning a diverse movement into government. Dejan's Links: Student List (English): https://vratikonjuglavu.blokade.org/en /studentska_lista/ Student movement (English): https://vratikonjuglavu.blokade.org/en/ Dejan Šoškić' s professional profile: https://www.sylff.org/fellows/dejan-soskic/ Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com Support Neutrality Studies: https://neutralitystudies.com/donate Neutrality Studies shop: https://neutralitystudies.com/shop Time Stamps 00:00 Serbia's political transition 02:42 Election results and the Student List 10:21 Constitutional rights and institutional decline 14:23 Color revolution claims and movement funding 24:57 Novi Sad and the roots of the uprising 33:49 Foreign policy, Kosovo and Russia sanctions 36: 22 From student assemblies to parliamentary government 49:22 Europe, neutrality and Serbia's future

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today we have a very special update with a previous guest of ours, Mr. Dejan Soskic, who was the governor of the Central Bank of Serbia and is now an elected member of the new Serbian parliament on the student list. Dejan, welcome back.

#Dejan Šoškić

Good morning, and thank you very much for the invitation, Pascal.

#Pascal

Well, thank you very much for saying yes to this. I was quite surprised when I read that your name was on the student list and that you actually got elected. So congratulations on your election victory. First of all, can you tell us a little bit about what's going on right now for you? Like, how is this whole process unfolding? When will the new parliament sit for the first time? And how is the decision-making process going for who will form the government?

#Dejan Šoškić

Yes, well, first of all, thank you for your congratulations. I believe that the student movement and the people of Serbia really deserve the congratulations. Many of us who were, in one way or another, involved in the public debate concerning, let's say, Serbia's overall political and economic situation have supported the list, and therefore we are now among these 250 chosen by the students.

Now, the next step is obviously to have a parliament session, which is going to take place next Tuesday, the 17th. We expect that to last maybe a couple of days, and that is when our mandates should be officially recognized, let's say, so that the new structure of the parliament should be in place, including the new president of the parliament. Then the next thing on the agenda would obviously be to elect a prime minister, or basically to nominate someone to form a government. So that is something that should happen in the coming period, hopefully without taking too long. Then, by the end of the year, most probably, we will have the presidential elections. Hopefully, this time we will have a president who is not going to step outside his or her, you know, constitutional framework. And there is also the issue of municipal-level elections, which also need to take place within a certain period of time.

The previous ruling political structure also controls most of the municipalities in Serbia. And I would say that now, especially after these elections, that is definitely completely at odds with the overall level of popular support.

#Pascal

So what is the mood like now in Serbia, around you and so on? I mean, Mr. Vucic's idea was to step down as president, then have these elections, win a majority, and make himself prime minister. That backfired hugely. And what percentage of the vote did the student list actually win? And how many other opposition parties are going to be in parliament with you?

#Dejan Šoškić

First of all, these elections, like all previous elections run by the political structure headed by Mr. Vucic, were completely unfair. In many respects, they were unconstitutional in the sense that you had a lack of freedom of speech and a lack of media freedom. Basically, his party controlled most of the electronic media, and you could find places in Serbia where people simply couldn't hear anything that wasn't controlled by the political structure in power. And then again, you know, you had all of these, let's say, unconstitutional and criminal acts and behaviors, like pressuring people to vote for a certain political party, even blackmailing private companies to make their employees vote for a certain political party.

And if they do not, then the owners of these private companies could be barred from participating in any public tender organized by the government, or maybe by a municipal government as well. So there was a lot of this pressure. For example, you work for the Ministry of Finance, you're a regular professional, and then you need to go and support a certain political party just because you're working for a government institution, a ministry, or a public sector company, and so on. Not to mention that the number of people on the list of eligible voters is almost identical to the number of people living in Serbia. So there are clear irregularities concerning the whole, let's say, list of eligible voters. This list is obviously inflated for many reasons, and that is, let's say, most probably used to rig the outcome to a certain extent.

Then we had, you know, a turnout of 70% of this very large voter list, which is most probably unrealistic. So the real turnout might have been even higher than that. And of those 70%, more than 50%—53%, actually—voted for the student list. The Vucic political structure got somewhere around 39%. So we have a total of 250 seats in parliament. The student list will have 140 seats. The Vucic list is going to have 103. And then we have a couple of seats for the minorities. What is very interesting is that the student list actually won a majority of the vote among our Bosniak minority, the basically Muslim population living in the south. We also have representatives of Bosniaks on the list, but also of Hungarians. So the student list actually fared better than their minority lists. And we also have the Albanian minority living in the southern parts of Serbia, which has, I believe, two seats in parliament.

#Pascal

Okay, so that's going to be quite an interesting configuration, actually, because it's, of course, a plurality system, so it's not winner-takes-all, and you will have several parties. But the student list basically has the majority, with 140 out of 250 seats. So whenever all 140 members of the student list come to an agreement in parliament on who they want, for instance, as prime minister, they can decide that, and so on. How united is the student list as a group? I mean, those of you who got elected.

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, it's actually composed of non-political people. Maybe, you know, people tend to think that I'm one of the individuals on this list with the most previous political exposure. And for me, I can tell you what I do know, despite the perception, especially how the outgoing political structure wanted to portray me. You know, I do know that I have never been a member of any political party. So, you know, I have worked as a, let's say, public servant, as governor of the National Bank of Serbia for two years. And I was nominated by the president of the country at that time, Boris Tadic, who was also president of the Democratic Party.

But I really did not know him, either personally or in any other way. I was basically one of, let's say, four or five candidates at that time being publicly discussed as possible people to take the helm of

the central bank. So I was proposed by an individual that I did not know. I did not belong to his political party. That was a good signal for me and, at the same time, a good signal for making the central bank an independent institution, which I believe should be the case. And at the same time, you have the council of the central bank, which serves as a supervisory body elected by parliament, consisting of five people.

Basically, all of them were non-political people. So I would say that things were moving in a good direction at that time, let's say in 2008, 2009, 2010, and so on. So I basically became governor of the central bank in 2010, and I resigned in 2012 when the new political structure came into power. They wanted to enact a new law to, first of all, put a political figure in the central bank, but also to include some elements that would be detrimental to the independence and efficacy of the central bank. So most of the people on this student list, about 250, actually did not have previous political experience.

And I would also say that this was a victory for a student list that defeated not just the ruling structure, but also maybe the opposition. Because now we have a parliament that is going to have only two major players, with, let's say, maybe seven or eight MPs outside of this two-party structure. So a lot of political parties that participated in these elections and had previously operated for years are now really facing a challenge: what to do next and whether to reform in some way. Many of the leaders who decided to participate in the elections have already resigned.

And, you know, the whole situation concerning these elections was like a referendum: yes or no. So, among these 250 candidates on the student list, you have a lot of people who do not actually have identical or, let's say, very similar views that you would find in a regular political party. But the unifying factor is: we want our constitutional rights. We want democracy to work. We want freedom of speech. We want freedom of the media. We want the freedom to choose whoever we want, as is our constitutional right. We want human rights. We want civil rights.

We want the rule of law. We want all of these normal things that we actually had to a much greater extent in the past. I'm not going to idealize anything before 2012. Serbia was still developing, but let me just mention some things that we can hear and see directly, living here in Serbia. International observers have also made very thorough assessments of what was going on in Serbia. For instance, Serbia was not free of corruption before 2012, but from 2012 up to now, Serbia has fallen 36 places in Transparency International's rankings. And now we're at our historical low. At the same time, we are also rated as one of the three or four most corrupt nations in Europe.

Then, if you take, for instance, the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators, measuring the rule of law, institutional independence, voice and accountability, and all of these other parameters used to estimate the level of institutional development, you see a huge and undeniable slide in all of these areas for Serbia, starting in 2014 all the way until now. Then you take, for instance, the Basel Index. You are Swiss, and you perhaps know that there is a Basel Index that deals with, you know, money laundering and terrorism financing. And Serbia has also slid on this list. We were actually the

only nation in Europe at the time to have been blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force. That was in 2018 and 2019, I believe.

And that is an institution that deals with money laundering and the financing of terrorism. And in all the other areas, you know, look at what Freedom House is saying about what is happening in Serbia, and so on. So all of these, you know, indicators from international observers have shown clearly that Serbia is drifting away from, let's say, not just European values, but also from our constitutional framework. And we have experienced here that this one man in power basically wanted to do everything unconstitutionally. He was breaking the constitution every day. He was acting as a prime minister. He was acting as a prosecutor. He would announce who would be arrested, who was not guilty, who was guilty, and things like that. This is completely, completely irrational. If you look at the statements of this individual, you would be horrified.

You know, for instance, during the election process, he said that, well, after the 25th, we will not have any more universities. We will not have a prosecution service. And this is because these institutions have, you know, pushed back. The students initially took a blow, but then, you know, the university as a whole and universities throughout Serbia also supported their students against this regime and so on. So many of the professors, but also high school teachers, elementary school teachers, and some of the prosecutors—whoever wanted to do their job according to the law and the Constitution of Serbia—have been under fire if that was in any way considered to be against the interests of the ruling structure.

#Pascal

Hey guys, Autumn Spirit is here, and we've launched our new merch. For instance, the monster from our Kill Symposium has arrived on T-shirts, tumblers, and magnets. The little fella is really cute. Check it out. Any purchase directly helps us keep the lights on.

#Dejan Šoškić

So thanks a lot, and see you soon.

#Pascal

So this is highly fascinating, of course. And I think within Serbia, of course, you had this huge debate about all of these domestic factors, right, that incentivize people to vote for a student list, as you just laid out. The question to me is: what are the geopolitical implications of this? There are these commentators, and one of the most serious ones, to me, is Brian Berletic, who says, look, the student list has all of the fingerprints of a color revolution, of being influenced by or having received money from outside, from NGOs and so on, and that this is actually kind of getting rid of a government that was not in line with this EU-European-NATO kind of anti-Russian sentiment. What's your take on this kind of accusation?

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, you know, I've also been watching some of the analysis by Brian Berletic, and I understand that he's reading lots of documents and reaching certain conclusions that are interesting and so on. But on the ground, let me just tell you this. First of all, Vučić was absolutely fully in line with Western politics on all of the major issues. I would say that this is a widespread perception among the Serbian population. You see how he acted concerning Kosovo and Metohija, a region that proclaimed independence in 2008. You see that he was actually fulfilling all of the requests coming from the international community concerning this issue.

You also see that some former high-ranking government officials are now coming forward and saying publicly that they believe Vučić was actually supported by certain powers from the West to come into Serbia and deliver what the previous government did not want to deliver concerning the presence of the Serbian state in our province of Kosovo and Metohija. I don't know how much of this is true, but that's what these former high-ranking politicians are claiming.

Concerning the accusations of a color revolution and things of that nature, well, what I can tell you is that, in the past couple of months, I have also been active in various activities organized by the students—and not just me, but many other people. We have been traveling around Serbia to participate in public debates in public squares and things of that nature. First of all, it was all very modest. We would only, you know, use a couple of microphones, an amplifier, and a couple of speakers to do this. But we also all paid our own travel expenses. You know, I would say every one of us has contributed our own personal funds to this activity.

And I also have something to report to you: a couple of people I know who live in the West and are, I would say, you know, financially secure expressed a direct desire to give support, to donate to the movement, because they believed that unifying and normalizing Serbia and getting rid of this totalitarian regime was a worthy cause to support. So there were a lot of donations. I can also tell you that, for a normal election process, you need to have some premises—let's say, business premises—for the electoral staff supporting the whole process.

And so those premises were donated to the students. At the same time, you need to know that the Constitution of Serbia and the laws provide for budgetary support for the electoral process, which is quite substantial. For instance, the 140 seats in parliament also provide, you know, financial support, which, by Serbian standards, is more than enough to organize a political organization dealing with normal, everyday politics and so on. So you also have budgetary support for the elections.

You also receive an advance payment to organize elections, which, depending on the outcome, you either need to return or become eligible to receive more. So Serbian students have actually outperformed many expectations concerning what the final result would be. There is also this budgetary support. So there is definitely, I would say, a mix of financing in the student movement. But I would also suggest: why wouldn't you perhaps consider inviting some of the students who

have, let's say, been involved in the organization for a long time? They can certainly tell you more because I'm basically an outsider to the student organization. I attended some of these plenums as a professor maybe two years or so back, and I can testify that the system of debating is very democratic.

It's actually something that I would say is, first of all, highly organized. I was pleasantly surprised that they had very strict rules on how to debate. Everyone was getting a chance to express their views. And then they would vote on any issue, including who was going to represent the students for certain activities, let's say. And in my opinion, it was also a necessity in the very strict political system that we had in Serbia, which was preventing people from acting freely without consequences. Every time you had a clear leadership structure in any country, political party, or movement, you would have direct attacks in the media controlled by Vucic. They would actually tell a huge number of lies—let me be frank, a huge number of lies—about these individuals. They would come up with disgusting observations and, you know, humiliating comments and things like that.

So that's not really, I would say, easy to endure. And then, you know, they would also use all the other elements of the government apparatus to put pressure on you. Many people have lost their jobs. For instance, if you had a small private company and supported students, as some people have been doing, financial inspectors would come directly to your premises. They would prevent you from participating in tenders organized by any government body. They would pressure your family. They would pressure whoever they could if they saw that you were opposing them.

And therefore, the students needed to come up with something to, let's say, diversify the risk for the people representing their organization. And therefore, you had all of these, you know, situations in which one group of students would represent them on a certain issue, then another group would emerge representing them on something else. And despite that, many of the students have actually suffered a lot, being treated completely unlawfully by the police. Some of them have been beaten up. Some of them have been arrested. Some of them have been humiliated in various places.

I remember one student who was just expressing his own views in a public square. He was arrested, and he was allowed out of prison, where he was being held completely unlawfully, to attend his father's funeral with his legs in chains, you know? And that was something that the camera captured, and we could see that unlawful humiliation of people who only wanted to exercise their constitutional rights. So all of this actually angered Serbian people. And, you know, in many Eastern European countries, you can obviously have a debate about whether the society is democratic or not. Serbia is not in any way a country that can claim to have a long democratic history, let's say.

But what we can claim is that, first of all, we have had a multi-party system since 1881. We obviously had a communist period when we didn't have a multi-party system, but also, the Constitution of Serbia from 1834 was one of the most liberal ones. And the people who led this uprising against Ottoman rule, which started in 1804, were also pushed by the other people of Serbia, who wanted democratic elections for the so-called Serbian Council in 1823. People wanted to

vote for their representatives and didn't want to feel oppressed even by their own people in the process of liberating our country. So, you know, we didn't really have feudalism and all of these elements that you can find in some other countries, especially in the eastern part of Europe. So I would say that citizens of Serbia, you know, cannot put up with repression for too long, you know?

#Pascal

Yeah. So it's also very interesting how you explain how this structure of the student movement came about, because it's highly unusual for a party to function basically without a leader. But you're saying this is out of the necessity of the moment. If it were a party with a strict leadership structure, it would have been cut down, as has happened before. And the people who were engaged in this organically learned from that. Hence, you must have a flat structure. So it's not that this was instigated from outside. It's just the organic learning process of what is possible in order to oppose the current regime.

#Dejan Šoškić

That is my understanding, yes.

#Pascal

Now, how big a surprise was this? Because I didn't have that on my radar, actually, to be honest. I knew about the protests, and we've seen them and were aware of them. But especially since Vucic was talking about, you know, becoming prime minister and whatnot, I thought this was basically a done deal. I mean, how big of a surprise is the victory of the student list to Vucic, and also to ordinary Serbians and people that you interact with? Was this expected inside Serbia, and we just outside never, never, never realized? Or is it a surprise inside Serbia too?

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, I would say that, you know, first of all, the ruling structure might have been surprised. You know, they publicly claimed that they were going to get more than 50 percent, and so on and so forth. But that shouldn't surprise anyone because we have unfortunately gotten used to hearing all of these completely ridiculous claims and, you know, untruthful statements from our political establishment. I can tell you my personal expectations. I was quite confident that change needed to happen because, in the previous elections in 2023, despite the unfair elections we had then, which we also had now in 2026, Vucic actually lost in Belgrade, in Nis, and in Novi Sad. And with his trickery and control of the institutions, and maybe bribing some of the people in the opposition and so on, he just barely held on to power.

So, for instance, if you take the local municipal structure of Belgrade, in terms of the number of people voting for his coalition and against his coalition, more people voted against his coalition. And

that was in 2023, before the canopy fell and killed 16 innocent people on the 1st of November 2024 in Novi Sad. That was, I would say, a trigger. People finally realized that this cannot go any further. The corruption and complete dissolution of the institutional framework in Serbia are now killing people. Let me just tell you this. The station where the concrete canopy fell on innocent people—bystanders and people traveling by rail, right?—was officially still a construction site.

According to the documents, it was a construction site, despite the fact that it had been opened twice before in front of the cameras and used by politicians to cut the red ribbon and hopefully get some political points out of this, making ridiculous claims like, "This is the most modern station in Europe. This is the safest station." On public media, on government TV, you can see them claiming these things. And obviously, citizens started using this facility. It had actually been, you know, meddled with by unprofessional people from these corrupt enterprises and so on. They did not do all the necessary things that needed to be done. If you're refurbishing or renovating, let's say, a half-century-old station, you need to assess all the elements that could prove to be unsafe and not put additional weight on them, which they did.

I think that 20 tons of additional weight were put on this canopy, which it simply could not hold. So, a lot of incompetence. And incompetence is something that goes hand in hand with corruption because, as you know, it's not just about ridiculously inflating the invoices for public projects, but also trying to minimize the costs. And that sometimes leads to choosing incompetent, cheap companies connected to the political structure, which is obviously profiting from this illegal activity of corruption.

And I believe that most of this has really become very clear to most of the population in Serbia. That has been a triggering point. And then the student movement emerged because students have been beaten, not just by the police, but also by these hooligans, you know, organized by the political party. So you had people organized by the ruling political party whose sole purpose was to physically attack peaceful demonstrations. And the students have been suffering from this in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade.

And when the students were physically attacked by these hooligan groups organized by the ruling party, that's when the student movement really started. You know, they initially had four demands for the government, including prosecuting those responsible for physically attacking the peaceful student demonstrations. And they also decided to block the University of Belgrade, but very soon other universities in Serbia were also blocked until these four demands from the students were met. And then, after a while, we had a huge protest in Belgrade.

More than half a million people came, and I can certainly tell you it was a much larger civil protest in March last year than any previous protest we had against Milosevic in the '90s. And, you know, the population of Serbia has shrunk since then. We are now less populous than we were in the '90s. And still, more than half a million people came just because the students called on them to show support for the students' demands. And it was, I would say, a clear sign of who really holds legitimacy in

Serbia. At the same time, the ruling political structure wanted to organize their protests and their rallies, you know, to show that they also have support.

And they could only manage to, you know, bring together, let's say, 10 or 15 times fewer people, despite the fact that they had been paying them per diems. They had fed them. They had also pressured many people working in the public sector to come to these rallies. And as for the people who came to support the students, on that day, the 15th of March, all of a sudden bus transport was halted without explanation. Rail transport to Belgrade was halted on the false pretext that there was, you know, information that a bomb was somewhere on a train to Belgrade, and things like that.

We never had these types of attacks in our history before that, or even since. So it was very clear who held legitimacy. In my view, in a normal democratic society, if someone calls for a protest against the ruling party and is capable of attracting 10 to 15 times more people, that would be a clear signal: we need to get out of this situation by having elections, right? But the political structure has, you know, turned a blind eye and postponed elections for as long as they could, until these elections that we had at the end of October, on the 25th of October.

#Pascal

You know, what you're describing is actually very similar to some of the outcomes that we saw in relatively recent history, right? The countries of Eastern Europe that came out of communism back in the 1980s, right? They had these mass rallies against the communist parties and then swept away the previous structures. We've seen that in other places too. In Myanmar, for instance, when the dictatorship actually let people vote for the first time, Aung San Suu Kyi and so on won all of the seats that they could contest. So this is, in a sense, a very traditional type of counter-reaction to ongoing repression, and the type of corruption that you're describing is very classic.

It's never easier to engage in corruption than with construction projects. You invoice one million for a couple of pillars, and then inside you just hollow them out and whatnot. And then, yeah, sure enough, these types of tragedies occur. Now we're at the point where, okay, this is a done deal, and this new parliament will sit next week. How does the decision-making process work within this student list? Because, again, it must be a group of very diverse people. How about Serbia's foreign policy? Do you expect that Serbia's 2007 decision to maintain military neutrality will keep standing? What kind of foreign policy do you think the student list will adopt toward the EU, toward NATO, and on ongoing foreign policy questions?

#Dejan Šoškić

Yes, well, as you can imagine, the whole movement is not about foreign policy. It's basically about our internal situation, and we would definitely want to concentrate first of all on what is going on in our country. But as you may have heard, the student list has a program, and it's a large document that also deals with foreign policy issues. The student list is advocating, first of all, against imposing

sanctions on the Russian Federation, but it is also very clear on legality. The student list's whole approach is about respecting the rule of law, respecting the Serbian Constitution, which states that Kosovo and Metohija is part of Serbia, and also respecting UN Resolution 1244, which also states that Kosovo and Metohija is part of Serbia.

And if you recall, Resolution 1244 was actually adopted by the Security Council under Chapter Seven, which is binding on all member states. It was voted for by all the permanent members of the Security Council, but also by the non-permanent members at that time. So this is our standpoint: we are a member of the United Nations, obviously, and we would like to respect legal documents and elements of international law produced by the United Nations. But the student list also stands for full recognition of the Serbian Constitution.

#Pascal

So no changes are expected when it comes to Kosovo and the current setup. And also, interestingly, in that case, to the approach toward Russia. I mean, no sanctions, at least for now. So how is the decision-making process going to work? Of course, once you and the other 139 parliamentarians are in parliament, then you have a place to discuss all of that among yourselves, right? But I suppose that you will try to maintain all the links, of course, to the base and these discussion clubs, the way they have been operating. What will the decision-making process look like from here on?

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, I would say that now things have changed. You know, the way of making decisions, which was appropriate for the period up until the 25th of October, is also going to evolve. We have sessions with candidates and students. We're debating issues, we're voting on certain things, students are proposing certain solutions, and so on. So now we have not just the student organization, but also the student list of 250 people. We also have a smaller group of 140 MPs who are going to start making their own decisions and voting in parliament, hopefully from next Tuesday.

So I would say that gradually there is also going to be a shift in the decision-making process, which, in the new circumstances, could actually evolve from a horizontal structure to a vertical one. That structure will, you know, obviously be capable of making decisions in a shorter period of time while still retaining the democratic aspect of the decision-making process. And that is going to, I would say, evolve in the period ahead of us. We are constantly in contact with students, and we debate these issues. And I'm glad to see that, you know, these 250 people we have on the list are quite extraordinary because they did not have any, so to speak, political baggage before their selection for this list, but they still have professional accomplishments.

They have definitely proven to be capable of acquiring knowledge because we have more than 150 PhDs on this list. So there are bright people there, people with a very strong sense of responsibility and logic, capable of expressing themselves with intelligent ideas. And I myself am enjoying

participating in these sessions because I hear a lot of very bright things and a lot of good proposals. We have a democratic structure, and all of the people are devoted to tolerance and a democratic way of making decisions. So I would say that, so far, it has proven to be capable of delivering very good outcomes.

#Pascal

Yeah, it's a very interesting development, actually. Are you afraid, though, that, you know, there might be power struggles along the way? Because that also often happens in movements, especially when the horizontal structure becomes a more vertical one.

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, you can never rule that out, you know, but up till now, I see that the 250 of us really did not know too many of the other candidates on the list before it was formed. You know, we are also from various parts of the country and from various professions. A huge proportion comes from universities, but there are also very, very many people coming from, you know, the arts, sports, high schools, and the medical sector, and so on.

So what I can tell you is that the cohesiveness is really significant and growing as we get to know each other. I would say that there is a very good chance that we will be very, very cohesive in the future. But also, you know, you can never rule out that people will start, you know, insisting on certain differences. Currently, the program is unifying us, and the core values that we want to see in our society are also unifying us. However, I would say that it wouldn't be unusual to see some differences, and no one really wants to have a new, let's say, one-party system in Serbia.

We are not objecting to maybe some political changes in the future, or to the emergence of new political parties on the scene. And I would really like to see the political parties that are participating in Serbia's democratic system be democratic within themselves, which wasn't the case with many of the political parties that we have seen. They're participating in a democratic process. They're promising the voters that they will, you know, serve in a democratic way. But when you look at how they operate within the party, you see that there are people staying in power as the ruling structure in these political parties for decades, not really allowing other opinions to be voiced, and so on. So I would say this was a very, very important lesson for our country, for our society.

Citizens, I hope that now we will enter a phase in which all of us are going to be much more aware that democracy is something that we need to preserve and fight for. And the Constitution also requires citizens to push their political representatives to fully adhere to the Constitution of Serbia, to the legal framework, and to freedom of the media. That is very important. The media have been completely, completely controlled by this previous political structure, with some—let's call them media—basically being among the filthiest propaganda outlets that you can find anywhere. And hopefully, we will not have that for much longer in the sphere of public information.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, we connected before on this channel, also complaining about the might of the media networks to actually impose certain views and whatnot, and the propaganda that is coming from them. So Serbia is no different from Germany and France, where the propaganda is emanating from central TV stations. But the student list movement is fascinating, of course, because it managed to bridge a lot of differences. Any party in parliament, in democracies, usually has to have some form of political outlook on the world. So, left and right, you know, social democratic, social conservative, however you want to describe it.

How do you think the student list is going to deal with the fact that it must have a lot of opposing ideological viewpoints? I mean, you must have liberals in there. You must have Marxists in there. You must have social democrats in there. You probably have very green-oriented people in there who care a lot about the environment and so on, while other members will probably think, well, maybe later, but not now. I mean, how do you think this ideological positioning of the members will work out over time? And where would you actually position the student list on the political spectrum?

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, it's not easy, really, to place it firmly on the political spectrum. I would say it's in the center, maybe slightly center-left, because, judging by the program of the student list, you can find very clear intentions to create a humane society in Serbia, to provide better, more accessible health care, to, you know, give employees more protection in their dealings with capital and private employers, and so on. And there's also a focus on the environment. I would say that these elements of the program don't really conflict with one another.

And I really do not see much of a problem with implementing the program in practice because, you know, it's very much in line with the values of civilized societies: wanting to protect the environment, wanting to create a humane society, wanting, actually, to create sort of a welfare state, but also recognizing international obligations and contracts, while also wanting to analyze whether these contracts can, to a certain extent, be amended to protect the interests of our country more. We have witnessed that many of these contracts have actually been signed without taking into account the interests of Serbian citizens and Serbian institutions. The Serbian side has been very much neglected in many of these projects that were signed by the previous regime. So I do not see too much of a problem with conflicting areas. However, you know, if you go into details and so on, you can obviously find people having different opinions. But, you know, even if people do have different opinions, through discussion maybe they can converge to a certain extent. And I have experienced many of these situations in which, you know, open debate with arguments can obviously change opinions and lead to some sort of compromise and convergence of views.

So that is also taking place within the student list, but also among the students. And I would say I'm quite optimistic. You know, I have to say that maybe a year ago, I thought the first new government

should basically be there only to establish, you know, a solid foundation for fair elections. And then, in these new, fair elections, you would have, you know, all of these political parties fairly competing for public support. But now I see, first of all, that, you know, the majority of people really voted for the student list.

And I see a coherent structure of people, but also a coherent program that could, you know, last for a full term. I wouldn't rule out the new government pushing to implement the student list's program for the full term. But we'll see. I think it's important that we have taken this first step. Obviously, the road ahead is not easy. But I also believe that there are solid grounds to ask the international community, let's say, to give us time to consolidate the state on a constitutional basis, not to force us to make certain choices before we have a consolidated, well-functioning democratic state.

And all of these external issues could also be dealt with, I would say, later on, maybe a couple of months later, when we have more information, when we have free media, and so on. What Vucic was actually doing was depicting the European Union, to a certain extent, in a negative light. Because my personal view—and this is not the view of the student list—is that he never wanted to bring Serbia closer to the EU. Because bringing Serbia closer to the EU would basically also mean dealing with media freedom, the rule of law, and all of these aspects that are contrary to the interests of his regime, his corrupt regime.

Now, the student list obviously has this program, and EU officials looking at it have said, well, basically, we find here a lot of these things that we have been asking the Serbian government to do. But the point of view of the student list is that we want to do this for our own sake, not necessarily for the sake of, you know, fulfilling the requests coming from the EU. The idea is that if we are building our society and developing institutions, then, when the time comes, if the offer comes from the EU, there should be a referendum for the Serbian people on whether they wish to join the EU or not.

#Pascal

Right. Serbia is in a very similar position to Switzerland. The EU is right there. You obviously cannot ignore it. It is the most important trading partner, so there needs to be a way to somehow deal with that. On the other hand, whether or not to join is a really big question because it does come with a lot of shackles. You would say the student list hasn't made up its mind, but it is pretty obvious to everybody that there needs to be some form of engagement with the EU. However, there's also the non-European world, right? There's Russia, there's the Orthodox Church, and so on. I mean, there must be tension. So do you think that Serbia will continue, also under the student list, to somehow, you know, follow a neutral course and interact with everybody? Or is there a chance that Serbia might swing into the European camp when it comes to this great-power conflict that is going on at the moment?

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, it's not easy to predict what the path is going to be a year or two ahead of us. What I believe is that the student list has a very balanced approach. I think it was very important also for the purposes of the election process. We have gathered support from many social strata within Serbian society. But I would also say that it wasn't insincere. I think that the student list really wants to promote these elements further. I would say that this is one of the most sincere political movements that I have seen in Serbia so far. And I also don't see that there will be any major obstacles. You do know, for instance, we have been discussing sanctions against Russia and why my personal opinion was that this was the wrong path for the West to take. And Serbia has also been in a situation where it was on the receiving end.

Sanctions were imposed on Serbia. We have seen that, you know, regular people were suffering. We didn't have gasoline at gas stations. We had a decrease in salaries. You know, all of these elements of, let's say, a normal livelihood were endangered and deteriorating for regular citizens, but it didn't really change Milosevic's policies. We suffered for 10 years under these sanctions, and they didn't really have that impact on his policies. So, you know, having this experience, I would say that there is widespread resentment towards sanctioning anyone. And I would also remind you that Serbia is unique not just because these sanctions were imposed on us, but also because we were bombed by NATO countries in 1999. That is very clear and vivid in our memory.

And we tend to think that that was an act of aggression. And we also see acts of aggression elsewhere. Serbia and the student list are against any aggression, but we also cannot be blind to the fact that some acts of aggression provoke one type of reaction, while others do not provoke the same type of reaction, and so on. So, you know, the world is such, unfortunately, that a small country like Serbia may find itself under pressure from some very powerful, let's say, international organizations and countries, which basically want to impose policies that most probably would not always be considered fair and principled in all similar situations.

#Pascal

Yeah, and this was a very good explanation. Thank you very much for that. I understand much more about how this works, and that, overall, the student list still has to be looked at as a very national organization, focused on national issues and certainly motivated by national priorities. Dejan, for people who want to know more about the student list, about you, and about where things are going, what's the best place right now to follow Serbian politics in English, as well as you guys, your politics, and where things are going?

#Dejan Šoškić

Well, the student list has its website. I would recommend everyone go there. It's also in English, so I would say that's a good source. But you can also now find a lot of podcasts on YouTube discussing the student organization. You have a lot of students who have actually been on various podcasts in

English and in Serbian, including many in English, so you can easily find student representatives directly on YouTube. I want to underline that I'm not a direct representative of the student organization. I'm just one of the 250 members on this list for entering the Serbian parliament. And I would really advise people who want to know more about the organization to listen to the students directly.

#Pascal

That makes a lot of sense. I will try to gather all of these links and put them into the description box below. And we will hopefully talk to you again soon for updates. We wish you luck. We wish Serbia luck. Thank you. And we wish you much peace.

#Dejan Šoškić

Thank you. Thank you so much.