

Saša Radulović: My plan is to become Mayor of Belgrade and use that platform to win Serbia's next parliamentary election

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13/10/2016

Serbian opposition leader [Saša Radulović](#), a former Minister of the Economy and leader of *Dosta je Bilo* (*Enough is Enough*), has ambitious plans. Speaking to *EUROPP* editor [Tena Prelec](#), he elaborates on why he feels Serbia has lost its way under Aleksandar Vučić's leadership, gives details of the media blackout he alleges his movement suffers from, and explains why he believes the image of Russia as an ally and protector of the Serbian people has been artificially created by Serbia's political elites. As he reveals, his plan is to run in upcoming elections in Belgrade, from where he hopes to set a precedent in terms of good governance and to gain more visibility for himself and his movement, with a view to launching a strong campaign in the next parliamentary elections.



Saša Radulović is careful not to profile himself as a politician who is 'just like all the others' in Serbia. He is definitely not playing by the established rules of the game: little presence in traditional media; no pandering to rehearsed nationalist rhetoric; and no looking for protection among Western institutions. The movement he founded after resigning from his ministerial post in January 2014 has become a relatively sizeable opposition party within the Serbian parliament, but – at 6% of the vote after the [April 2016 ballot](#) – [Enough Is Enough](#) is still a far cry from obtaining the level of support which would allow them to rule the country.

Shaking off the apathy

Given these ambitions, why not look for funding among wealthy donors or adopt strategies that would allow them to get hold of a portion of the vote currently going to their competitors? "We don't do it because it is not what we are after. We are not attempting to steal voters from the existing parties: we are awaking people from apathy", Radulović explains. Ultimately, he says, it would also fare badly with the public. The biggest objection the movement receives from voters at present is: How do we know that you are different? How do we know that, once you get into power, you will not behave in the same way as everybody else?

Radulović meets this criticism head on: "I have already been in power: I had a budget of €300m. I didn't take a cent of it, and didn't let anyone do so either. I have attempted to clean up the system, and when it was no longer possible to do so, I resigned. I would have to be a really stupid man to create my own political organisation from scratch, to embark on a campaign without any funds, to refuse to enter into a coalition with any other party and to eventually

win the elections – just to then go back to do what everybody was doing until then. If I wanted to do so, I would have stayed where I was”.

Here, he refers to his experience heading the Ministry of the Economy during the first Vučić government – a position Radulović held for five months, from September 2013 to January 2014. The reality of what he encountered there is described by his close aide, academic Dušan Pavlović, in the book [‘Money-wasting machine: Five months at the Ministry of the Economy’](#). Radulović and Pavlović’s friendship goes back decades, having both been part of the Yugoslav pop rock scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The book is a stark account, from an insider’s perspective, of the functioning of the Serbian Development Agency (formerly SIEPA), of the Agency for privatisation, of Serbia’s Development Fund, and of the Ministry of the Economy itself – all of which are accused of gross mismanagement of public funds, endemic nepotism and corruption.

The alternative version of Serbia that Radulović sets out is one in which the myth of an all-powerful ‘tsar’ is left behind, and the concept of a society fair for everyone is embraced instead: “Serbia does not need a leader. Serbia needs a fair system and rules which are the same for everyone. It needs laws that are respected, independent institutions, and the undoing of ‘partitocracy’, which is the structure we have now – a system in which the government de facto controls all three powers. This system has created its own state within our state. Our mission is to bring it down, and our aim is to build a system in which there are the same rules for everyone’.

Their outlook is regional: Radulović believes that the problems affecting Serbia are by no means exclusive to his country, and that similar issues exist throughout the Western Balkans. They intend to help political movements sharing their ideals throughout the region, and have recently started doing so during the [parliamentary elections in Croatia](#), supporting a newly established party, ‘Pametno’, which narrowly failed to pass the threshold required to gain representation in parliament.

The struggle at the ballot box

The movement openly complains about suffering from a media blackout. Jasmina Nikolić, the party’s General Secretary, explains that the difficulty of reaching out to the masses via traditional media has pushed them towards promoting just one recognisable figure (Radulović himself) while neglecting other key activists. Nikolić is concerned that this has cornered them into seemingly defending themselves (by ‘whining’ about what is wrong with the current system) on their rare media appearances, rather than pro-actively speaking about their concrete [programme](#) – another criticism they often receive.

With their TV appearances and visibility in the printed press limited, the movement has focused their campaign almost exclusively on social media. Even so, Enough Is Enough fared well at the [elections held in April this year](#), becoming the ‘surprise’ of the contest by winning 16 seats in parliament. Conversely, the April elections were a blow for Prime Minister Vučić, whose party had advocated holding the elections in the first place, but ended up losing a considerable number of seats, falling short of the absolute majority which it previously possessed. In the aftermath of the elections, government formation proved a difficult task – which took five months to complete.

Although it is currently only the fourth political force in the country, Enough Is Enough claims to be ‘the only real opposition’ in Serbia. After Vučić’s Progressives (which still dominate the parliament in spite of their recent losses),



Saša Radulović (left) and Jasmina Nikolić, Enough Is Enough’s General Secretary. Credits: LSE EUOPP

the two other parties that fared better in April were Ivica Dačić's [Socialists](#) (currently in a de facto coalition with Vučić) and Vojislav Šešelj's [Radical Party](#) – a far right party that represents, for Radulović, a 'false opposition'.

At the ballot box, the movement emerged as the clear preference of the diaspora voting from London (over 40 per cent supported the movement). It also registered a strong showing in Belgrade. According to internal polling, Enough Is Enough's support has doubled in the Serbian capital since the elections. And it is indeed from Belgrade that Radulović intends to start his next offensive. He reveals that he intends to throw his hat in the ring at the upcoming Belgrade municipal elections, running on a ticket which involves the cancellation of the controversial [Belgrade Waterfront](#) project, which is funded by investors from the United Arab Emirates and supported by Vučić and the current mayor of Belgrade, Siniša Mali. The elections for Belgrade's City Assembly – which elects the Mayor – are officially due in 2018, but there is a distinct possibility for them to be held alongside the Serbian presidential elections in spring 2017.

In tying his campaign to opposition to the Waterfront project, Radulović is likely set to capitalise on his activism so far. He has been supportive of what has arguably become the most widespread protest movement in Serbia since Slobodan Milošević's ousting: marching behind the slogan '[Ne Da\(vi\)mo Beograd](#)' (Let's not drown / give away Belgrade), thousands of Belgraders have repeatedly expressed their vocal opposition to the construction project, which is seen as elitist, non-transparent and prone to corruption. For their part, Enough Is Enough highlight that this is only one of the many battles they have engaged in, and also that they have been fighting to challenge the legality of the Belgrade Waterfront contract since the very beginning – not least by initiating legal action with the Constitutional Court, whose answer they are still waiting for.

Radulović's plan is to restart the process from scratch, announce a public tender, and draw up a new urban plan dividing the territory into land plots which would then be sold individually. He doesn't hide from the fact that a reversal of the project would carry costs and take a substantial time to be implemented, but he asserts (in English) that 'it's never too late to do the right thing'. He believes that the exceptional value of the land in question is capable of contributing much more to the public coffers, which are, he suggests, being deprived of great wealth with the current deal.

The battle lines: an engineered threat from the East and deaf ears on the Western front

Much has been made of Russia's use of soft power in the Balkans. During last April's elections, most of the foreign media coverage [billed](#) the contest as a test for the 'pro-European' ruling party against the advance of nationalist, pro-Russian forces: Šešelj's Radicals and the far right parties DSS-Dveri. Political commentators have also highlighted how Russia has [upped its game](#) on the Serbian media scene in recent years.

While not dismissing the fact that Russia, like all the big powers, is interested in extending its influence within territories of geo-strategic importance, Radulović tells a different story. "Sputnik Serbia is a tiny outlet, which simply does not have the power to make a big difference in the minds of people. What gets to the Serbian citizens are the big tabloids, such as Informer and Sprski Telegraf. These publications are notoriously close to the Prime Minister, and at the same time they also keep peddling a pro-Russian stance and constantly aggrandising Putin's role. Now you tell me, who is to gain from this?"

The suggestion is that Russia's 'threat' has been partially engineered by the ruling powers to maintain the feeling, at home and abroad, that something decidedly bad could happen should Serbia's ruling party falter. While this assertion cannot be proven, it is made more salient by the fact that Western institutions have placed their faith in Vučić as their man in Serbia – something which still continues, as evidenced by the many congratulations that came Vučić's way after the April elections.

Given the principles motivating Enough Is Enough, the party may have anticipated that international actors promoting western values would have supported their endeavours, but so far this has not been the case. When pushed to discuss why they have not tried to win over the sympathy of EU officials and other western embassies,

Radulović and Nikolić are adamant: “We have tried repeatedly to expose inappropriate behaviour and wrongdoing, but all we ever hear from western officials is the same mantra – ‘We believe Serbia to be on the right course’ – although, clearly, what we are trying to denounce would not be tolerated in their countries”.

The way chosen, then, is to do it all alone – with no support among traditional media, no external support, and no large donations from outside the country – convinced as they are that the EU’s institutions will start taking Enough Is Enough seriously only after it has established itself as a major player through the ballot box. The task looks daunting but Radulović is unfazed: “We will win at next year’s Belgrade municipal elections, we will win at the next parliamentary elections, and I will be the next Prime Minister of Serbia”.

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About the interviewee / author

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