

Political Leaders after the Cold War.**The Case of Slobodan Milošević: Toxic vs. Charismatic Leader**

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Abstract: The end of the Cold War is often associated with the close of the year 1989, characterized by the regaining of independence in Eastern Europe countries that were under dictatorships. The end of the Cold War was also connected with the fall of the Berlin Wall or with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. This paper is aimed to present Slobodan Milošević, analyzed as a toxic but also as a charismatic leader. Furthermore, this paper analyses the role of this political leader in Serbia and also in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The paper presents the concept of “toxic” leader, with the purpose of identifying characteristics of this type of leaders. In order to perceive the complexity of the concept, the paper is focused on a multidimensional study that should emphasize the intentions, the behaviors, the character of a “toxic” leader, the impact and also the consequences of his decisions and actions. Focusing on Slobodan Milošević, this paper also outlines essential aspects which describe “charismatic” leaders and addresses the challenging possibility of the “charismatic” leaders being “toxic” leaders simultaneously.

Keywords: toxic leadership; charismatic leadership; political leadership

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. (John Quincy Adams)

1. Conceptual framework: Leadership

Leadership is based on team spirit, defined as people's desire to think, feel and behave harmoniously in order to reach a common goal. Team spirit is the result of integrating four processes: building trust between the people involved; establishing a common mission and clear objectives that are agreed by those involved; conducting participatory decisional processes; strong motivation of the people involved. "Leadership is that process in which one person sets the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment" (Elliott & Clement, 1994, p. 4).

According to Michael Frank, leadership involves the interaction of at least two individuals having the purpose of accomplishing a goal (Frank, 1993). Leadership guides people and, in order to accomplish a vision, it requires motivation and mobilization of those involved in order to move in the same direction, despite major obstacles. Leadership requires followers because it implies a relation between the leader and his followers.

The more a leader is skilled in managing relations with his followers, the more efficient he is. True leaders inspire, entusiast, stimulate and motivate followers. True leaders appeal to emotions in the same time knowing how to manage their own emotions and how to perceive and control the emotions of a group, deciphering in them the impact of their own emotions and manifestations.

The fundamental task of a leader is to inspire positive feelings in those he leads. (Maxwell, 2002) Regardless of the importance of a situation, followers turn their attention to the leader and they expect his reaction, which will serve as an emotional guidance. By his answer, the leader offers to his followers a way of interpreting the significance of events and thus to emotionally react. If the leader panics or if he is annoyed and angry, his emotions will spread among those with whom he usually interacts. On the other hand, despite all difficulties he faces, if the leader shows confidence and optimism, these emotions will also be "contagious". Successful leaders emit powerful positive energies that are transmitted to their followers. Leaders must be aware of the fact that their communication style and behavior influence the followers. Consequently, leaders cannot always afford to express their feelings and they must first of all analyze the impact of their emotional manifestation.

Daniel Goleman outlines that emotional intelligence is an important aspect in the analysis of leadership. He points out that the opposite of the emotionally intelligent leader is the emotionally toxic leader. This toxic leader can poison through his negative emotions and through the emotions he causes to his followers. Leaders that are frequently nervous, annoyed and irritated can be emotionally toxic leaders. Many leaders from this category are often overwhelmed by these negative emotions and they cannot even be aware of the negative consequences they produce (Goleman, 1995).

Throughout history, the leader of every human group was the one from whom followers expected safety and clarity, the one who offered them emotional clues. This fact is still available nowadays, because the leader has maximum capacity to influence everybody's emotions (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2005).

2. A Portrait of Toxic Leaders

Leadership literature over the past decades has set the objective to identify the characteristics of "good" or effective leadership, leaders being often perceived as heroic or saviours of organisations if a crisis occurs. Nevertheless, there has been increasing focus on the darker side of leadership, its' characteristics, causes and consequences. The dark side of leadership behavior has been described by terms such as "petty tyrants" (Ashforth, 1994); "toxic leadership" (Benson & Hogan, 2008; Whicker, 1996); "destructive leadership" (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007); "bad leadership" (Kellerman, 2005); "leadership derailment" (Tepper, 2000) and "aversive leadership" (Bligh et al., 2007). Leaders that belong to these categories have different noticeable behaviors such as: self-aggrandisement; belittling of followers; lack of consideration for others; a forcing style of conflict resolution; punishment for no apparent reason and discouraging initiative, undermine organisational goals and the well-being of followers. Charismatic leaders can also become blinded by their own vision and power and they use charisma in a destructive manner (Slattery, 2009).

In the article "The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why Followers Rarely Escape Their Clutches", Jean Lipman-Blumen states that toxic leaders exploit their followers psychological desires and fears, such as the need for authority, order, security, belonging and the need to feel special. According to Jean Lipman-Blumen toxic leader are destructive, power-hungry people, seeking to control those around them

and possessing a dysfunctional behavior and toxic traits, for example lack of integrity and honesty, outsized ambition, egotism, arrogance, amorality, actions that intimidate, demoralize or marginalize others. The author also asserts that followers need leaders in times of crisis as uncertainty is the toxic leader's ally. Toxic leaders, in a definition proposed by the same author, are "individuals who, by virtue of their destructive behaviors and their dysfunctional personal qualities or characteristics, inflict serious and enduring harm on the individuals, groups, organizations, communities and even the nations that they lead" (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Jean Lipman-Blumen makes a distinction between the noble vision of a non-toxic leader and the grand illusions of the toxic leaders. While noble visions represent achievements that can be reached for the benefit of humankind, grand illusions "entail unrealistic nirvanas, a world purified not by improving ourselves, but by eliminating contaminating others (...). Toxic leaders insist that they alone are the saviors who can protect us from enemies and offer us the certainty, order and immortality for which we so fervently yearn." "The real tragedy of the human condition is not that we all must die, but, rather, that we choose to live by grand illusions, rather than to face our fears. Hence, we fall into the clutches of toxic leaders who promise us the moon, knowing full well they cannot deliver. In the worst of all cases, toxic leaders fall under the spell of their own grand illusions and believe that they can" (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

In the article "Toxic Leadership: A Conceptual Framework", Jean Lipman-Blumen emphasizes that leaders can be intentionally or unintentionally toxic. The leaders that are intentionally toxic injure others in a deliberate manner or enhance their position at others' expense. On the other hand, unintentionally toxic leaders cause negative effects as a result of careless or reckless actions. Toxic leaders have several characteristic behaviors, among which are the following: they undermine, marginalize, intimidate, imprison, torture or kill their followers and even non-followers; they violate basic human rights; they engage in unethical activities; they feed their followers illusions and depict themselves as saviors; they mislead followers by deliberately using untruths and incorrect diagnoses of issues (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

3. Charismatic Leaders

In the analysis of leadership Serge Moscovici introduces a new concept: charismatic authority (Moscovici, 2008). In his paper “Social psychology or the gods making machine” he explains charismatic authority as a domination generated by a strength that comes from inside. In the traditional meaning of the word, “charisma” is referred to a sacred character and nowadays charismatic leaders become the objects of mass adoration. Nevertheless, charisma is based more on people’s faith and less on personal talents of a certain individual. The relations of the leader with the masses are very personal, they are subjective relations based on a reciprocity illusion.

An interesting question is how a charismatic leader emerges? When circumstances are dramatic, when a major social rupture occurs and when people are disconcerted and believe that everything around them falls apart they are unconsciously in search of a representative that could give them safety that everything will be better again (Gallie, 2004).

The charismatic leader operates at society level. He seduces masses through nostalgia for the good past and he always reminds people of the tragic current situation. He is simultaneously superior to the others but also alike. It is interesting to notice the fact that, if a person that lacks charisma would send the same message, the masses undoubtedly would distinguish its falsity but when the message is presented by a charismatic person, they are unable to see the situation in depth. Therefore, charisma plays a major part in influencing human behavior.

In a research report published in 2004 by the Windsor Leadership Trust, four major characteristics of charismatic leaders are presented: “a dominant personality, desire to influence others and self confidence; strong role model behavior and competence; articulation of ideological goals with moral overtones; and high expectation of followers and confidence that they will meet these expectations.”¹

¹ *What is Leadership?*, Research Report, Richard Bolden, July 2004, Retrieved from: http://www.windsorleadershiptrust.org.uk/media/images/what_leadership_487.pdf

4. Slobodan Milošević Reflected in a Double Mirror – Charismatic vs Toxic Leader

Slobodan Milošević was born on 20 August 1941 in Požarevac, Serbia. He joined the Communist Party when he was 18. When Tito died, the Communist federation of Yugoslavia began to collapse and Milošević succeeded to take full advantage of its decline. He became President of Belgrade City Committee of the League of Communists and afterwards he was promoted to head of the Serbian Communist Party. His mentor and godfather Ivan Stambolic became President of Serbia in September 1987 but in December Milošević forced him to resign. Milošević was president of Serbia from 26 December 1990 and President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) from 15 July 1997 until 6 October 2000. As FRY President, he was also the President of the Supreme Defence Council of the FRY and the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav Army.

The term *Former Yugoslavia* is the territory that was known as The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) until 25 June 1991. The six republics that formed the federation were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia (including the regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina) and Slovenia. SFRY's existence ended with Slovenia's declaration of independence on 25 June 1991 followed by the declarations of independence by three other republics: Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only Serbia and Montenegro were left within the Federation and they declared the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on 27 April 1992. In 2003, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was reconstituted and re-named as a State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro's declaration of independence on 3 June 2006 and Serbia's on 5 June 2006 officially ended this union.¹

In the paper *Reexamining the "Serbian Exceptionalism" Thesis*, Veljko Vujacic outlines the fact that Milosevic's April 1987 Kosovo Polje speech foreshadowed the conflicts that were to come and, what is more important, almost instantly turned him into a charismatic hero, one that has the power to reach people's hearts and mobilize them: "The process of migration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo under economic, political and simple physical pressure is probably the last tragic exodus of a European population. The last time such processions of desperate people were seen was in the Middle Ages. But our goal is to overcome this state of

¹ *What is the former Yugoslavia?*, Retrieved from: <http://www.icty.org/sid/321>.

hatred, intolerance and mistrust. So that all people in Kosovo can live well. And this is why the first thing I want to say to you, comrades, is that you should stay here. This is your land, here are your houses, fields and gardens, your memories. You are not going to leave your land just because life has become difficult, because you are suffering from injustice and humiliation. It was never in the spirit of the Serbian and Montenegrin people to withdraw in the face of difficulties, to demobilize when it should fight, to become demoralized when the situation is hard. You should stay here both because of your ancestors and your heirs. Otherwise, your ancestors would be ashamed and your heirs disappointed (Milosevic, 1987 *apud*. Vujacic, 2004).

Milošević's direct appeal to people touched a powerful chord and he appeared as a prophet endowed with a "gift of grace", capable of putting an end to sufferance by performing the miracle of returning the holy land of Kosovo to Serbia (Vujacic, 2006).

Veljko Vujacic states that Milošević addressed the discontent of Kosovo Serbs in a new way, appealing to the traditional heroism of Serbs and Montenegrins, to their land, memories and ancestors and asking them to mobilize and stop injustice and humiliation. "Milošević pursued a two-pronged ideological course, promising the preservation of Yugoslavia and socialism to party officialdom and army officers and Serbia's reunification and social justice to the masses" (Vujacic, 2004).

Louis Sell argues that after his speech held in Kosovo Polje, Milošević, known among his subordinates as "Little Lenin", reinvented himself as a charismatic nationalist. He discovered how the emotional force of nationalism could be used to mobilize popular energy and he used it the best he could. Milošević developed a short and simple speaking style, easy to understand by everybody and obviously different from the Communist jargon used by Yugoslav politicians that preceded him (Sell, 2002).

Theorizing the concept of charismatic leadership, Robert House believes that charismatic leaders' distinguishing mark is their tendency to dominate, a strong conviction in their own beliefs and ideals, the need to influence others and a high self-confidence. House outlines that charismatic leaders simultaneously communicate high performance expectations and confidence that their followers are able to accomplish these goals. Charismatic leaders transform the perspective upon the given expectations, making them to appear more heroic, morally correct and meaningful (House, 1977 *apud*. Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

Veljko Vujacic links the complexity of Milosevic's appeals to the major slogans of the rallies of solidarity with Kosovo Serbs that affected Serbia and Vojvodina in summer 1988. These slogans blended in new ways attitudes and feelings such as extreme nationalism, frustrated aspirations for social justice and reform, populist adoration for the leader, nostalgia for the glorious days of Yugoslavism. In the opinion of Veljko Vujacic, Milosevic's political success was determined by the simultaneous appeal to very different types of voters: Yugoslavia, unity, and Titoism for the party orthodox and army officers; Serbia for the nationalists and state support for the Kosovo Serbs; reform and rehabilitation for the intellectuals, social justice and protection for state-dependent workers and pensioners. From this perspective, Milosevic appears as "the conciliator of the greater Serbian aspirations of Serbian nationalists and the Yugoslav orientations of army officers, party officials, and others; of technocratic aspirations for economic reform and workers aspirations of social justice; and, finally, as an orthodox communist who violated traditional norms of party behavior by giving free rein to mass activity and thereby satisfied the aspirations for political participation of an audience disgusted with the ineffectiveness of institutions without giving it true representation" (Vujacic, 2004).

Arguments that support the image of Milošević perceived as a toxic leader can be found in the book *The Balkans after the Cold War, From tyranny to tragedy*, written by Tom Gallagher. The author argues that Slobodan Milošević manipulated nationalism in order to increase his own political ambitions and under his rule, "Serbia was adopting an increasingly belligerent stance towards other territories in a federation which had enjoyed stability and high international standing by repudiating the politics of ethnic antagonism." Gallagher presents several opinions regarding the case of Slobodan Milošević, among which is the perspective of the Polish journalist and former dissident, Adam Michnik, who claims that Milošević "correctly recognized the weakness of the democratic world; its inability to take risks, its failure to recognize the seriousness of the threat; and lastly, its cowardly egoism have created a situation in which fanatical nationalism and cynicism seem to be triumphing. What is more Milošević has infected others in the Balkans with his idea of an ethnic state" (Gallagher, 2005).

The negative traits that Milošević possessed are emphasized by Douglas Hurd and Malcolm Rifkind, British foreign secretaries who influenced international policy on the issue of the Bosnian war and who regarded Milošević as a "Balkan Bismarck,

imposing political order on a fragmented state, albeit with brutal methods”. The military analyst Milos Vasić argues that “Milošević was unaware of the destructive power of the Serb nationalism he had unleashed; that the Pandora’s Box of war went out of control and that he himself was surprised by the fact that the war of ethnic extermination gained such a momentum as to make it a self-supporting suicidal machine.” In the above-mentioned paper, Tom Gallagher also states that “Milošević used hate-filled propaganda to license violence on a grandiose scale. Milošević was the product of a communist bureaucracy during a period of decline who was less concerned about ideology than with perpetuating his own hold on power” (Gallagher, 2005).

In an article published in March 2006 in *The Guardian*, Ian Traynor portrays Milošević as “the first European head of state to be prosecuted for genocide and war crimes, he emerged to embody the dark side of European endeavor (...). In short, he became Europe's chief menace, the most dangerous figure in post-cold war Europe. (...)To the civilian victims of Srebrenica and Vukovar, Sarajevo and Dubrovnik, Pristina and Banja Luka, he was the chilling embodiment of the evil men can do.”¹

Milošević’s image as a toxic leader is also emphasized by the different modalities in which he was portrayed: he was labeled a tyrant, a butcher and a war criminal responsible for the last 10 years of mayhem in the Balkans, a dictator and a “serial ethnic cleanser”. Violent attacks came from the Western media and most politicians described him as a guilty criminal who needed to be disposed of as quickly as possible. Only Henry Kissinger was a little softer on him: “Slobodan Milosevic is not another Hitler, but a small-time Balkan thug” (Stevanovic, 2004).

Milošević gradually pursued a well-planned strategy in order to strengthen his power in Serbia and ultimately to dominate the entire Yugoslavia. His plan almost became successful because by 1989 he controlled the votes of four of Yugoslavia’s eight units. The reason of his failure was the counter-nationalism that emerged in other Yugoslav republics. Slobodan Milošević was arrested on 1 April 2001, by Serbian authorities and he was transferred to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on 29 June 2001. Slobodan Milošević passed

¹ Ian Traynor, *Slobodan Milosevic*, Retrieved from:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2006/mar/13/guardianobituaries.warcrimes>

away on 11 March 2006 and on 14 March 2006, the Trial Chamber terminated proceedings against him.

According to the case information sheet from the website of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia¹, Slobodan Milošević was indicted in the case of Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina “for genocide; complicity in genocide; deportation; murder; persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds; inhumane acts/forcible transfer; extermination; imprisonment; torture; willful killing; unlawful confinement; willfully causing great suffering; unlawful deportation or transfer; extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly; cruel treatment; plunder of public or private property; attacks on civilians; destruction or willful damage done to historic monuments and institutions dedicated to education or religion; unlawful attacks on civilian objects.”²

Peter Stambolici, former activist of the Communist Union from Yugoslavia, protector of Slobodan Milošević during his accession to the political hierarchy, stated for *Le Monde* on June, 2nd 2002: “The Serbs worshiped Milošević as he was God and by identifying with him believed that they will become a heavenly people. The Serb people and Milošević were like one identity. Milošević is the most perfect expression of the worst trait of our personality. That’s why he found a common language with the people, a language accessible for all. This is the expression of our despotic conscience. The Serbs don’t love the man who wants to govern; they want a master, a ruler. This people searched for a ruler for half of their history and for the other half they tried to free themselves from his rule. Consequently, the responsibility for the drama does not belong only to Milošević.” (Nițu & Nițu, 2006)

In a certain sense, Peter Stambolici expresses a reality because the majority of the Serb people followed Milošević in the attempt to accomplish the national program elaborated by the Serbian political elite. On the other hand, it is hard to believe and prove that the majority of the Serbians shared the modalities, the ways and methods used to accomplish the objectives of this program. Thus, if the problem of a certain

¹ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is a United Nations court of law established in 1993 and situated in Hague, which deals with war crimes that took place during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990’s.

² Case information sheet “Kosovo, Croatia & Bosnia” (IT-02-54) Slobodan Milošević, Retrieved from: <http://www.icty.org/cases/party/738/4>

responsibility belonging to Yugoslav political leaders for the conflicts triggered and for their consequences may be posed from a political and moral point of view, juridically speaking there can be no collective responsibility.

After the tragic episode of conflicts, Serbia itself wanted to identify the guilty and their responsibilities and also to clarify how such a disaster was possible for a prosperous country that had good perspectives to ensure its' prosperity and be in the vanguard of European processes.

Serbian political forces mainly consider that Milošević and his supporters are to be blamed for the disaster Serbia had to face as a consequence of conflicts. In an interview for B-52 radio station on March 18th 2006, Milošević's funeral day, his former opponent, the writer Vuk Drašković stated: "This is not a public funeral, as it was said, this is a funeral meeting of the people. All plateaus and markets were too narrow to receive the victims of Milošević and of his regime, that were killed, constrained to lose their faith, displaced and scattered all over the world."

On the other hand, there are series of aspects that certify that a great part of Serbian population believe that Milošević is guilty and is to be blamed for not succeeding to accomplish the Serbian national program. The future will eventually establish the place of Milošević in Serbia's history.

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