

Montenegro : a programmed victory for the ruling coalition?

On 14th October next the Montenegrins are being called to ballot to renew the 81 members of Parliament. These general elections are taking place six months early. The Democratic Socialist Union (DPS), which has dominated the national political field for nearly 20 years and led by Prime Minister Igor Luksic and President of the Republic Filip Vujanovic, will, in all likelihood, win again in this election. Local elections will take place on the same day in the towns of Niksic, Budva and Kotor.

The Political Situation

The general elections follow the dissolution of Parliament that was approved on 26th July last, 47 votes in favour, 27 against. The members of the DPS, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) led by Ranko Krivokapic, the Bosniak Party (BS) led by Rafet Husovic and the Democratic Albanian Union (DUA-UDSh) led by Ferhat Dinosa supported the dissolution. "We believe that a parliament and a government that has a full four year mandate will be able to rise to challenges better in this difficult phase of integration that we now are going through," declared Milutin Simovic, MP (DPS), in justification of the organisation of early general elections. The authorities have highlighted the fact that they want the government and the parliament to move forwards in the EU accession process with a full four year mandate in hand. Montenegro officially became a candidate on 17th December 2010, two years after having delivered its request. Podgorica's negotiations towards EU membership started on 29th June last.

On 7th September the European Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle reminded Nebjosa Kaludjerovic, the new Foreign and European Integration Minister that Podgorica absolutely had to continue its reforms. "The opening of membership negotiations in June was just the fair acknowledgement of the impressive progress that Montenegro has made in the reform

process," declared Stefan Füle adding, "the constitutional reform, the overall strengthening of judiciary independence and the fight to counter corruption and organised crime are amongst the most urgent issues." "Montenegro could become the next country to join the EU after Croatia," declared the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy.

The opposition parties are accusing the government of precipitating the election to escape its lack of popularity that will ensue after it is forced to implement austerity measures over the next few months. "Some difficult times are on the horizon and the members of the government coalition are perfectly aware of this," stressed Andrija Mandic, leader of the New Serb Democracy (NSD).

"The opposition does not know whether it will be able to stand united in the elections and the government fears another difficult winter (demonstrations have occurred repeatedly since the start of 2012 to the point of calling it the 'Montenegrin Spring'), this is why it wants the general election to take place as soon as possible," says Milan Popovic, a political science professor at the University of Podgorica.

The Political System

Montenegro has a unicameral parliament (Skupstina), which comprises 81 MPs elected by proportional representation (according to the d'Hondt method) within

General elections in Montenegro 14th October 2012

in a single national constituency for 76 of the seats and of a special constituency for 5 of the seats that are reserved for national minorities. In these general elections all of the latter have been allowed to put specific candidate lists forward, a measure that was once reserved for the Albanian community only. Every list has to win at least 3% of the votes cast to be represented in Parliament but this threshold is lower for the minorities.

With this measure the opposition is accusing the DPS of trying to win the support of the parties representing the minorities, notably the Bosniak Party led by Rafet Husovic, a member of the outgoing government which to date has stood in coalition with the DPS and the SDP.

Individual candidates have also been accepted. Every candidate has to win the support of at least 1% of the electorate to be able to stand officially (4,983 to be exact).

At present 11 political parties are represented in Parliament:

- the Democratic Socialist Union (DPS), of outgoing Prime Minister Igor Luksic, led by former head of government (2003-2010) Milo Djukanovic, allied to the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Bosniak Party (BS) and to the Croatian Citizens' Initiative (HI) led by Marija Vucinovic. Together these four parties have 48 seats;
- the People's Socialist Party (SNP), an opposition party led by Srdjan Milic, has 16 seats;
- New Serb Democracy (NSD), an opposition party led by Andrija Mandic, has 8 MPs;
- the Movement for Change (GZP), an opposition party led by Nebojsa Medojevic, has 5 MPs;
- the Democratic Albanian Union (DUA-UDSh) led by Ferhat Dinosa has one seat;
- Forca, led by Nazif Cungu, as 1 MP;
- Albanian Alternative (AA) led by Vesel Sinishtaj has one seat;
- the Democratic Alliance of Montenegro (DCG), led by Mehmet Bardhie, has one seat.

Reminder of the General Election Results on 29th March 2009 in Montenegro

Turnout: 66.19%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
European Montenegro (Democratic Socialist Union, DPS, Social Democratic Party, SPD, Bosniak Party, BS and the Croatian Citizens' Initiative, HI)	168 290	51.94	48
Socialist People's Party (SNP)	54 545	16.83	16
New Serb Democracy (NSD)	29 885	9.22	8
Movement for Change (GZP)	19 546	6.03	5
Others	51 744	16.55	4

Source : The Electoral Commission of Montenegro

The Electoral Campaign

3 electoral coalitions are running in the general election on 14th October next. The first is an alliance between the Democratic Socialist Union and the Social Democrats; the second rallies under the name of the New Democratic Front, with New Serb

Democracy, the Movement for Change and the Pensioners, Disabled and Social Justice Party and the third, - Srpska sloga – rallies the Serb List, the Radical Serb Party, the People's Party and the Serb Homeland Party.

The New Democratic Front is led by former Foreign

Minister and former Ambassador of Yugoslavia in Italy, Miodrag Lekic. Janko Vucinic, chair of the main committee of the Free Union Federation and Ognjen Jovovic, the students' representative of Niksic, have joined this coalition. "We want to help towards Montenegro's political, economic and daily progress," declared Miodrag Lekic, who said that the party was open to everyone and notably to the People's Socialist Party led by Srdjan Milic.

The latter refused to join the alliance however. "We are seriously considering boycotting the elections," declared the party's Deputy Chair, Neven Gosovic just a few weeks ago. The People's Socialist Party will finally be standing alone but some of its members, such as former President Predrag Bulatovic,

have joined the New Democratic Front. "My only opponent is the ruling coalition" maintained Srdjan Milic.

In an interview with the daily Pobjeda, sociologist Srdjan Vukadinovic stressed that the electoral campaign was more dynamic between the opposition parties themselves rather than between the opposition and the ruling parties.

According to the latest polls the coalition run by the Democratic Socialist Union (DPS) is due to win the election easily on 14th October. It is forecast to win 44% of the vote. The New Democratic Front is due to win 17% of the vote. All of the other parties are forecast to win under 10%.

Milo Djukanovic's coalition wins the general elections in Montenegro

Unsurprisingly the "For a European Montenegro" formed by the Democratic Union of Socialists (DPS) of outgoing Prime Minister Igor Luksic, led by former Head of Government (2003-2010) Milo Djukanovic, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) led by Ranko Krivokapic – two parties allied in power since 1998 –, won the general elections that took place six months early on 14th October in Montenegro. It won 45.6% of the vote taking 39 seats in the Skupstina, the only chamber in Parliament. For the first time in 11 years the coalition did not win the absolute majority however. This is due in part to the recent changes that have been made to the electoral law, which now allows the parties representing the national minorities to stand alone for the suffrage of the electorate. "The decline of the Democratic Union of Socialists is obvious. The electorate is not prepared to accept the same messages anymore and to support the coalition in office. From now on the opposition has a chance," declared Zlatko Vujovic, director of the Center for Monitoring (CEMI), explaining why it did not win the absolute majority.

The New Democratic Front led by former Foreign Minister Miodrag Lekic, that rallies Andrija Mandic's New Serb Democracy (NSD), the Movement for Change (GZP) led by Nebojsa Medojevic, and the Pensioners', Handicapped and Social Justice Party, won 23.7% of the vote and 20 seats. The People's Socialist Party (SNP), led by Srdjan Milic won 10.5% of the vote and 9 seats. Positive Montenegro (PCG), the new centre-left party founded last May by Darko Pajovic, won 8% of the vote and 7 seats. Together the parties representing the country's minorities won 6 seats. This year the latter were allowed to put specific candidate lists forward, a measure that was reserved to the Albanian community only in the past. The Bosniak Party (BS) won 4.5% of the vote and three seats

and the Albanian Party Forca per Bashkim, 1.4% of the vote. Finally the Albanian Coalition (1.1%) and the Croatian Democratic Initiative (HGI) each won a seat.

Turnout totalled 69.60%, ie 3.41 points above the rate registered in the last general elections on 29th March 2009.

The election on 14th October followed the dissolution of Parliament approved on 26th July last. The government in office said it wanted the country to be able to move forwards towards EU membership as it requested a further four year mandate. Montenegro became an official candidate on 17th December 2010, two years after it had delivered its request. Membership negotiations led by Podgorica with the 27 opened on 29th June last.

Results

Results of the General Elections on 14th October 2012 in Montenegro

Turnout: 69.6%

Political Parties	% of votes won	No. of seats won
European Montenegro (Democratic Socialist Union, DPS, Social Democratic Party, SPD)	45.6	39
New Democratic Front (New Serb Democracy, NSD, Movement for Change, GZP, Pensioners' Handicapped and Social Justice Party)	23.7	20
People's Socialist Party (SNP)	10.5	9
Positive Montenegro (PCG)	8.9	7
Bosniak Party (BS)	4.5	3
Forca per Bashkim	1.4	1
Albanian Coalition	1.1	1

Source: Agence France Presse

"It is a major victory. The coalition in office in Montenegro is one of the rare ones in Europe to have retained the confidence of the electorate in these difficult times of crisis," declared Milo Djukanovic when the results were announced. Before the election he said that he wanted the Montenegrins to vote "in support of the maintenance of Montenegro's stability, of economic recovery and the continuation of the road towards European integration and NATO." The coalition he was leading "For a European Montenegro" also chose the slogan "Naprijed Crna Goro" (Forwards Montenegro!) as its campaign slogan. "The stakes are high. Six years after our independence our State is still fragile and we have to strengthen it," he added.

Aged 50, Milo Djukanovic became the president of the Montenegrin government with the consent of the then Serb President Slobodan Milosevic (Socialist Party of Serbia, SPS) in 1991. He retained the seat until 1998, when he was elected the President of the Republic, a post he oc-

cupied until 2006. Until 1996-1997, the two men shared the same positions until Milo Djukanovic distanced himself from the Serb leader. At the same time he started to claim the independence of Montenegro. He saw his dream come true on 21st May 2006, the day when the Montenegrins said "yes" by a 55.4% majority to its independence from Serbia. He then quit as head of government in November after the first general elections in independent Montenegro, which were however won by the Democratic Union of Socialists. In 2008 he returned as head of government after the resignation of Zeljko Sturanovic (DPS) for health reasons. He resigned on 21st December 2010 some days before Montenegro achieved the status of candidate for EU membership.

In all likelihood Milo Djukanovic should become head of government after these elections. "As of tomorrow we shall begin forming the government which will take Montenegro towards the EU," he declared, without saying however whether he would take up the post of Prime Minister.

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