

# Montenegro: A Long Road to Democracy

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## Introduction

As a result of the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), seven new states emerged, which with different success during the 1990s have started the transformation process: political, economic and social. Throughout the Yugoslav-period, Montenegro, as one of the six republics, was the least interesting for scholars and media. First of all, because it was the smallest and at the same time the least developed federal member alongside with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> with just over 600,000 inhabitants,<sup>2</sup> but also as a republic that avoided open conflicts on its territory.

Still, Montenegrin transition is not an uninteresting case. The same political elite (the same political party) has managed all processes after the fall of communism, adapting its political and ideological (but primarily rhetorical) course. Apart from never experiencing a democratic change of government, i.e. via elections, Montenegro has not experimented too much with institutional arrangements either. Both of the “post-communist constitutions” shaped in a similar way a political system based on the principles of parliamentary democracy, with some modifications in practice when the presidents of the long-standing ruling party were at the same time the heads of state. While the principles and way of functioning of the executive and the legislative branches have slightly changed since the 1990s, the biggest changes have been introduced for the judicial branch that has not yet reached the required level of independence despite the requirements that Montenegro must fulfil in order to become a member of the European Union, which is one of the state’s foreign policy goals. The continuity of the same ruling elite has deleted the line separating the leading Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) from the state (apparatus).

This chapter aims to chronologically point out to key events that marked the Montenegrin political history after the fall of communism, including: the most important political trends and events; changes in the political system (constitutional arrangements); key trends and debates on electoral processes.

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<sup>1</sup> BIEBER 2003, 11.

<sup>2</sup> 620,029, see MONSTAT 2011.

## The “January Anti-Bureaucratic (AB) Revolution”

The change of the Montenegrin communist leadership in January 1989 was caused by various reasons. One of the burning issues was the economic crisis in the SFRY and the republic itself. Foreign debt in the SFRY amounted to 12.3 billion Dollars in 1979, and inflation exceeded 20%. Inflation in Montenegro continued to grow after 1979, the economic and social crisis deepened, with unjustified demands for price increase.

Such a situation in the SFRY corresponded to the growing nationalism, in Slovenia, for example, those who propagated an independent state, in Croatia, the Yugoslav confederation, and in Montenegro, a nationalism that had its roots in Serbia. This nationalism was advocated by an initiative for a more dominant federal state, which in most republics was seen as centralism and the return of “Serbian hegemony”.

During the nearly fifty-year existence of the SFRY, the Montenegrins occupied many managerial positions in federal institutions<sup>3</sup> while Montenegro, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, remained throughout the Tito period<sup>4</sup> the most pro-Yugoslav of all the republics.<sup>5</sup> Thus, although economic differences between the republics had affected the division along these lines and liberal tendencies in those economically more stable, Montenegro remained invulnerable both to nationalism and liberalism. Hence, it could be said that changes in the governing structure of the Montenegrin League of Communists (Savez Komunista Crne Gore, SKCG) came about due to the great dissatisfaction of the citizens combined with the extremely bad economic situation, but also because of the naïve belief of the then party leadership that the growing Serbian nationalism in the republic was not dangerous and the tendency to minimize its potential influence.<sup>6</sup>

The new Serbian nationalism was developed during the 1970s and 1980s and published in the memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) which had further negative effects on the already tense relations between the federal units.<sup>7</sup> Though the Central Committee of the Montenegrin SKCG condemned the appearance of the SANU memorandum in 1986, as a document with strong nationalistic language, support signatures were collected in the country, including those from the party members. During the same year, Slobodan Milošević as the newly appointed head of the Serbian communists took over the realisation of this memorandum, which had far-reaching consequences for Montenegro. In order to obtain majority at the federal level, Milošević needed Montenegrin support (and vote)<sup>8</sup> so the instrumentalisation of a loyal leadership in Montenegro turned out to be one of his priorities. The demands for greater rights within the republics<sup>9</sup> and new constitutional and legal status of the two provinces (within the republic of Serbia)<sup>10</sup> have followed the

<sup>3</sup> Montenegro also had the largest number of party members per capita of all republics.

<sup>4</sup> RAKOČEVIĆ 2013.

<sup>5</sup> ROBERTS 2007, 423.

<sup>6</sup> RAKOČEVIĆ 2013.

<sup>7</sup> The SANU memorandum argued for a fundamental reorganisation of the state but also condemned the decentralisation of the country and pointed to the discrimination of Serbia over such an arrangement.

<sup>8</sup> Serbia, two provinces, plus Montenegro (4 vs. 4).

<sup>9</sup> As part of the SFRY, Montenegro enjoyed certain rights under the 1974 Federal Constitution. Namely, it had numerous institutions such as the Constitutional Court, the Parliament, the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Bank.

<sup>10</sup> Kosovo and Vojvodina.

crisis. When the autonomous provinces rejected amendments to the 1974 federal constitution imposed without consultations, Milošević went with mass mobilisations and demonstrations. A series of protests in Montenegro had taken place during the summer of 1988 and these protests started with gatherings of workers due to poor working conditions. While the then leadership of the SKCG involved police intervention to suppress protests, the Serbian political establishment logistically supported the protests in Montenegro that induced changes within the party during the second round of protests. Throughout the AB revolution, the old political elite was labelled as “anti-Serbian” which necessarily qualified the new one as pro-Serbian. It remained pro-Serbian until 1997 when the division of the party happened. The old Communist leadership was overthrown by demonstrations in Podgorica on 10–11 January 1989, involving thousands of Montenegrin citizens. The new leadership troika – Milo Đukanović, Momir Bulatović, Svetozar Marović – dominated the Montenegrin political scene during the next decade, and some of them, to this day.

Given that no new party was established, this change was different from the transition of most Eastern European countries. There were no demands for reforms and democratisation at its core. In that sense, this could also be regarded as an “internal conflict”, although the newly appointed elite had not been in the party’s top leadership positions by then. At the same time, the changes advocated by the new leadership were more linked with the “achievements of the January revolution”, and not with democracy. So, the newly established way of governing could hardly be classified as a democratic, but rather as a hybrid one which combined democratic and autocratic elements.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the mechanisms behind the “after the January revolution” autocratic period (clientelism, positioning of loyal cadre at the managerial positions, media control, manipulations with electoral lists) are still in force today even to a greater extent. Though these mechanisms are not so brutal or obvious, they are more developed because of the thirty-year-long rule and control.

The new leadership of the SKCG has decided to remain in a common state with Serbia. This decision was also the outcome of the 1992 referendum. The DPS<sup>12</sup> fully controlled the state apparatus and financial resources, which is one of the reasons for the high percentage of votes (95.96% of 66.4% citizens who voted at the referendum) in favour of a common state advocated by this party although the turnout during the referendum was low. Since all the other republics had opted for independence by that time, this meant staying in the newly established Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) with Serbia.

## The U-turn of the DPS

Until 1996, the DPS cooperated closely and was a close ally of Milošević’s regime in Belgrade. Although the party succeeded in securing an absolute majority in the parliament at the 1996 elections, the political leadership – President of the state and the party Momir Bulatović and Prime Minister and Vice President of the party Milo Đukanović – soon started to disagree on the alliance with Milošević. Paradoxically, the conflict between the two party leaders arose only a few months after the DPS had won a convincing victory in the elections.

<sup>11</sup> DARMANOVIĆ–GOATI 2016, 15.

<sup>12</sup> The Democratic Party of Socialists was created by the simple renaming of the SKCG at the 1991 Congress.

If one takes into account that the DPS at that time was often – before Đukanović came to its forehead – called the oligarchic party, the conflict could be reduced to the struggle for power within the party and in the state itself. So, the most obvious reason for the split in the party was one connected to Milošević, but there are also interpretations that the cause is linked with some particular interests.<sup>13</sup> The faction of the party that supported Đukanović completely dissociated the DPS from Milošević's regime.<sup>14</sup> The final turnaround in re-orientation towards the West was strengthened by Đukanović's victory in the second round of the presidential elections in 1997, and by securing the required majority in the parliament a year later in coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and several smaller parties.

Strong support for the reformist forces in the country came from the international community, including financial assistance from the EU and U.S., which at that time turned away from Milošević. Control over economic activity and financial assistance enabled the DPS to develop a strong patronage and a clientelistic network alongside with positioning members and allies at high positions in key institutions, corruption and ability to change and adapt.<sup>15</sup>

Although Serbia's democratic changes during the autumn of 2000 made a shift from Milošević's policy, the DPS launched a campaign for Montenegro's independence, and its leader Đukanović placed himself at the forefront of the Independence Movement.<sup>16</sup> However, precisely because of democratic changes in Serbia, as well as due to the fear of instability in the Western Balkans and new potential conflicts, the European Union intervened in signing the Belgrade Agreement in March 2002, which obliged Serbia and Montenegro to stay in the common state for three more years.<sup>17</sup>

As part of a compromise agreement reached with the two political blocks, the EU has prescribed that more than 55% of the voters will have to vote for independence before any dissolution of the state union can happen. "The EU engagement in this case could be characterized as 'postmodern diplomacy', because the engagement was aimed directly to an internal situation in another<sup>18</sup> country."<sup>19</sup>

Taking into account the important issue of deciding on state status and restoring the Montenegrin statehood, it is understandable that the voter turnout was high at 86.5%. In May 2006, at the referendum, Montenegrin citizens voted 55.5% to support the idea of Montenegrin independence. Despite controversies<sup>20</sup> and a large number of complaints about the regularity of the process by the bloc for the state union, the OSCE estimated that "the

<sup>13</sup> DARMANOVIĆ–GOATI 2016, 19.

<sup>14</sup> The division within the ruling party in 1997 marked the strong polarisation of the society. Basically, the Montenegrin society was divided into two almost equal blocks: pro-Montenegrin–independents and pro-Serbian–unionists.

<sup>15</sup> DŽANKIĆ–KEIL 2017, 403.

<sup>16</sup> The Independence Movement was headed by the ruling DPS, while the political block advocating a common state with Serbia was grouped under the leadership of the Socialist People's Party and included the Serb People's Party (SNS), the Democratic Serb Party (DSS), and the People's Party (NS).

<sup>17</sup> The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

<sup>18</sup> Non-EU country.

<sup>19</sup> FRIIS 2007, 67–88.

<sup>20</sup> Montenegrins registered as permanent residents in Serbia were not eligible to vote and this was criticised by pro-unionists. See OSCE/ODIHR 2006, 8.

referendum was conducted in line with OSCE and other international standards related to democratic electoral processes”.<sup>21</sup>

The results of the referendum have contributed to the positioning of the DPS as the guardian of Montenegrin sovereignty and nation. However, the post-referendum period has not reduced the strong polarisations of the society. An additional cause for polarisation is NATO membership to which citizens and parties, despite the integration in 2017, still have divided views, while there is a consensus among political parties on EU membership.

Although Montenegro is implementing reforms under the EU conditionality since 2010 when it has become a candidate for membership in this supranational community, progress in democratisation is modest. Success within the integration process, especially after the formal opening of negotiations in 2012, can be reduced to formal opening of the negotiating chapters,<sup>22</sup> work on amending legislation and strategic documents and drafting action plans. In practice, enforcement of the regulation is at an unsatisfactory level, while a lack of transparency and accountability continue to be burning issues. The start of the EU negotiations was conditioned by progress within seven areas, including freedom of the media and effective anti-corruption activities,<sup>23</sup> and these areas are still crucial for the shift from undemocratic practices to the strengthening of the the rule of law and democratisation.

## The Political System in Montenegro

Outlines of the Montenegrin political system were defined shortly after the multiparty system establishment in 1990 and have not changed significantly to this day. The Montenegrin constitutions<sup>24</sup> from 1992 and 2007 stipulate division of power typical for parliamentary systems. It is an arrangement with soft division of power where the government is responsible to the parliament; the parliament directly decides on the election of the government, and at the same time oversees and controls its work. The Parliament has a central role with legislative and control powers. In practice, certain elements of the semi-presidential system existed from 1990–1997 and 1998–2002 when the presidents of the ruling party Bulatović and Đukanović were at the same time the heads of the state.<sup>25</sup> Under the Montenegrin Constitution, the President of the state is not obliged to withdraw from the position of the party president or to leave the party membership. Yet, by retaining the party president position, the head of state has greater political power and influence, controls the party decision-making mechanism, and thus has greater control over the work of the executive and legislative branch. In the 1992 Constitution, Montenegro opted for

<sup>21</sup> OSCE 2006, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Between July 2012 and August 2018 Montenegro has opened 31 negotiation chapters including the most demanding ones on the rule of law (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights [23] and Justice, Home and Security [24]) and provisionally closed three (Science and Research [25], Education and Culture [26] and External Relations [30]).

<sup>23</sup> European Commission 2010.

<sup>24</sup> The main goal of the constitution, as the highest legal act, is to create stability within the political system and to protect the fundamental principles and rights within a society. Consequently, the Constitution includes the competences of the central government and basic values.

<sup>25</sup> Such a situation was repeated this year, as Đukanović was re-elected as the country's President in April 2018 with a five-year mandate.

a President elected by citizens with more or less ceremonial role. Such a model is also retained with the 2007 Constitution.

## Parliament

The Montenegrin Parliament is unicameral and consists of 81 MPs with a four-year mandate, elected by citizens voting directly. Extraordinary parliamentary elections are frequent. So far, the mandate of the parliament has been shortened five times, and by the decision of the members of parliament (MPs) each time. The Constitution stipulates that shortening of the mandate may be initiated by a minimum of 25 MPs, the Government or the President of the State.<sup>26</sup> The Parliament decides by a simple majority at a session that must be attended by more than half of the total number of MPs. Supermajority is required when the Parliament decides on the rights and freedoms for citizens, Montenegrin citizenship, etc., while a two-thirds majority is needed for changing the electoral legislation.

The legislative part of the role of Parliament is mostly reduced to the voting for the proposals of the Government, as elsewhere, although the possibility of proposing legislation also has 6,000 citizens through the MPs they authorise. In accordance with the requirements arising from the European integration process, a decentralised model for checking harmonisation with the *acquis communautaire* has been established within the Parliament – seven permanent parliamentary committees perform this responsibility.

Although the European integration process has contributed to the understanding that parliament is not just a voting machine but also an important channel for the control of the executive, progress in that direction is rather symbolic. In line with this and based on the initiatives of the civil society and opposition parties, transparency of its work and openness towards the interested parties has been achieved. In this respect, the Parliament has also developed participation procedures, while two standing committees, the Committee for the Fight against Corruption and the Committee for European Integration, have been established. However, the control function has never been strong. In spite of improvements aimed at strengthening the oversight of this institution over the executive, such as the adoption of a special law on the parliamentary inquiry<sup>27</sup> as a particularly powerful mechanism, but also the improvement of other control mechanisms, MPs have never been sufficiently active.<sup>28</sup> The control function was nearly completely “removed” in 2017, as the opposition was fully out of parliament for almost the whole year. As a result, the Parliament conducted only one control hearing in 2017 and adopted conclusions that did not produce any mandatory activity for the institutions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Article 84 of the Constitution of Montenegro, see Constitution of Montenegro 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Law on Parliamentary Inquiry 2012.

<sup>28</sup> MAROVIĆ 2014.

<sup>29</sup> VICKOVIĆ 2018.

## Government

The Government of Montenegro represents the executive branch. In all the previous cabinets within the nine governments,<sup>30</sup> DPS has constituted the majority and all prime ministers have been from this party.<sup>31</sup> Milo Đukanović was Prime Minister six times, Filip Vujanović, Željko Šturanović, Igor Lukšić and Duško Marković<sup>32</sup> once. Although the number of ministries has changed, the government has modestly been transformed in its way of functioning and organisation (organisational units). The state administration reform faces numerous difficulties and so far three strategic frameworks have been altered to provide the modernisation of management and rationalisation of the number of employees.

## President of Montenegro

As already mentioned, the head of state is elected by citizens and his term lasts five years. The same person can be chosen at most twice. His/her jurisdiction is protocol-ceremonial, such as representing the state, proclaiming the law and announcing elections.

Montenegro has until now had three presidents: Momir Bulatović (1990–1998), Filip Vujanović (2003–2018) and Milo Đukanović (1998–2002, 2018–). Bearing in mind that, since 1990, Montenegro has went through four different state arrangements. Filip Vujanović has served as President on three occasions<sup>33</sup> and his third term was tested before the Constitutional Court which decided in his favour.

Pursuant to the powers most often held by the presidents within parliamentary systems, the head of state proposes the prime minister candidate, which, in a sense, gives him/her political influence, especially when more than one party has approximately the same support from citizens. However, in Montenegro such room for influence has never appeared.

## Judicial system

Just as the existence of a constitution does not imply constitutionality, the adoption and existence of a law does not imply legitimacy. With this clarification of the constitutional control, it could be said that the judicial power is actually controlled by the legislature and vice versa. Constitutional courts are another guarantor of human rights and freedoms and, therefore, the basis of democratic systems.

The Montenegrin judicial system has experienced most of the significant changes from all branches of the government, and the most significant changes were introduced by the constitutional amendments in 2013. These changes represent a significant step in securing the independence of this branch and imply the election of judges by the Judicial Council

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<sup>30</sup> Plus the Government of the Electoral Trust.

<sup>31</sup> Since 1998, all the governments were coalitions.

<sup>32</sup> Current Prime Minister.

<sup>33</sup> Although the constitution foresees two.

and not by the Parliament.<sup>34</sup> Also, the 2013 amendments stipulate that the Supreme State Prosecutor is elected by the same majority in the Parliament as the Judge of the Constitutional Court (two-thirds majority in the first round three-fifths majority in the second). Despite progress in defining the framework for the functioning of the judiciary, progress in securing its independence in practice has not yet been achieved.

## Elections

Though formal termination with a one-party system took place in December 1990 when the elections were held where several parties participated, this was not seen as a final breakaway from the communist system or socialism. The real transition started only seven years later.

Since the introduction of the multi-party system, a proportional system has been used with the different number of constituencies (1–14) and census/threshold (3–5%). At the moment, the whole country is one constituency with an electoral census at 3% while mandates are distributed on the basis of the D'Hondt method. Closed unblocked lists are used, meaning that the political parties are obliged to allocate half of their mandates according to the order set out in the electoral lists prior to elections.

During the thirty-year period, one party dominates the political scene, the DPS, which has won all the previous elections. Although formally elected through direct elections, the DPS rule is illiberal also because of the way it is elected.<sup>35</sup> Numerous corruption allegations, irregularities and affairs, including the audio recording affair, have impaired the conditions for a fair political competition.

## New Name of the Same Game – Elections in 1990

The first multi-party elections were held on December 9, 1990, where SKCG under the new political leadership won 56.2%. This victory was attained due to a number of factors, including the popularity of a new leadership loyal to the Serbian national movement and the weakness of the opposition.

SKCG entered the election race with great advantage over its competitors. In the fifty-year period this party ruled completely unharmed. Therefore, this party has controlled the entire state apparatus, as well as almost all (of) the industry and state resources. All major media were under the control of the SKCG, which provided easy access for the propaganda of the ruling party. In these media, there was limited space for opposition attitudes. In addition, the SKCG welcomed the elections with a fully-fledged, decades-long party infrastructure. Contrary to the SKCG, the opposition parties did not possess almost any infrastructure and functioned dominantly thanks to the engagement of their executives, experts, as well

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<sup>34</sup> In order to be free from political influence, the election of the President of the Supreme Court is also no longer the competence of the Parliament.

<sup>35</sup> Although, as already pointed out, Montenegro avoided open conflicts on its territory, it was hit with a situation in the country especially by the sanctions imposed to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by the United Nations in 1992. Drug, cigarettes and human trafficking were just some of the crimes that Đukanović has been charged by domestic and international media.

as citizens who gathered around common ideas and values. Because of all of the above, the SKCG won a majority in the parliament and its leader Momir Bulatović victory at the first Montenegrin presidential elections.

The SKCG, unlike most other similar Eastern European parties, has not tried to make a clear ideological breakaway from the previous regime. On the contrary, using the fact that most of the Montenegrin population still believed in the idea of self-managing socialism, SKCG presented itself as the only legitimate guardian of the communist legacy and the only guarantor of maintaining the territorial integrity of the state. In this way, a significant number of voters were attracted, who neither wanted nor were prepared for radical changes in society. Unlike SKCG, which hence profiled itself as a promoter of *status quo*, the strongest opposition parties represented different, albeit completely opposite, visions of the future of Montenegro. The Alliance of Reform Forces (Savez reformskih snaga)<sup>36</sup> was part of the wider Yugoslav Movement, which considered that Yugoslavia, and hence Montenegro, should go through as other post-communist countries. This implied, first of all, the creation of a functional democratic state, as well as turning to a market economy, and then gradually engaging in the European integration processes. In this way, a party system has been established in Montenegro, which is still in existence and defined in political theory as a multiparty system with a dominant party.

### **The birth of the domination of DPS (1992)**

The SKCG, now the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), once again won the absolute majority, which was a curiosity in the European context. “Observed comparatively, DPS is the only party in the post-communist countries of the South Eastern Europe that has managed to preserve in the second elections the absolute majority in the parliament gained in the first elections”.<sup>37</sup> How big the DPS dominance was is best illustrated by the presidential elections held in parallel with the parliamentary elections. Two DPS candidates (although Branko Kostić was not nominated by the DPS but by the Association of Warriors from 1991–1992) together won two thirds of the votes and faced each other in the second round where the DPS leader Momir Bulatović took victory. Nevertheless, despite the DPS domination, Montenegro got its first coalition government, made up of all relevant parliamentary parties as well as non-partisan representatives. It lasted less than a year, when DPS continued its absolute rule, while the other parties withdrew to the opposition.<sup>38</sup> Also, these were the first elections where, as a dominant political issue, was

<sup>36</sup> The Alliance of Reform Forces was not a unique party, but it was a set of more civic parties, primarily of social democratic and liberal political orientations. By contrast, the People’s Party (Narodna stranka) pioneered its ideas from pre-Communist and monarchical Montenegro. Their proclaimed goal was to return to the values of traditional Orthodox Montenegrin. The Democratic Coalition, which was made by a large number of parties representing Albanians and Bosniak-Muslim citizens in Montenegro, also entered the Parliament.

<sup>37</sup> GOATI 2001, 146.

<sup>38</sup> These elections had another interesting feature, namely more than 21% of the votes went to the parties which did not pass the threshold/census at the end. Probably the most important reason for such a large number of bullets was the significant proliferation of parties, many even with similar programs and names (with identical prefixes of Serbian, Communist, Socialist).

one on Montenegrin statehood and sovereignty and its relationship with Serbia.<sup>39</sup> Parallel to the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1992, for the first time in Montenegro, elections for the federal parliament were held where Montenegro delegated 30 deputies. The federal elections were held twice during 1992 and DPS won a convincing majority on both.

### **Pyrrhic victory (1996)**

The parliamentary elections in 1996 were the first and until now the last where Montenegro was not a single constituency. Facing these elections, the ruling DPS, without consulting the opposition, decided to divide Montenegro into 14 electorates (constituencies). DPS again won the absolute majority with 51%, thanks to the new electoral system. It almost took up two-thirds of the seats in Parliament.

These elections were marked by a new political phenomenon: the formation of the National League, the coalition of the Liberal Alliance and the People's Party. For the first time in Montenegro, there was a coalition between parties that almost did not have any touching points. First of all, these two parties had completely opposing views on Montenegro's state status and then on a whole range of other political and economic issues. This coalition has won so far, excluding the DPS, the largest percentage of votes in the elections in Montenegro. However, the synergetic effect was not achieved, which is why it was basically formed, because this relatively high percentage of votes represented the sum of the votes of its constituents from the previous elections. Despite the convincing victory, conflicts in the DPS started shortly and led to a final breakout in the party a year later.

### **First steps towards a new state status: Presidential and parliamentary elections in 1997 and 1998**

The 1997 presidential elections are by far the most important elections held in the modern history of Montenegro. By then, the seemingly, very homogenous and party-disciplined structure was divided into two almost equal parts. Đukanović prevailed in the party (DPS) due to the support of prominent members who controlled the ministries of finance, interior and the state security service. Bulatović came to the forefront of the newly founded Socialist People's Party (Socijalistička narodna partija, SNP).

As expected, Bulatović was supported by the Serbian leadership and federal government structures. Đukanović, on the other hand, was supported by a large part of the

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<sup>39</sup> DPS maintained close ties with the leadership of the FRY and Serbia, namely the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije [SPS]) and its President Milošević. Similar positions were also those of the People's Party and even the Serbian Radical Party (which in the 1992 election achieved a remarkable result and won 8 seats) but with Montenegro as a part of Serbia. Contrary to them, several parties clearly advocated the independence of the state. These parties had appeared in the first elections within the Alliance of Reform Forces. Among them, the most important one was the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro but it is also important to mention the Social Democratic Party of the Reformists, which, after being united with another party of social democratic orientation, will later become a long-time coalition partner of the DPS.

international community and during the second round of elections, the pro-independents opposition also stood by him, whose voters might have been key to securing the final victory of Đukanović with about 5,500 votes in favour. It should be emphasised that the supporters of the defeated party, who did not even admit the election results, were sent to the streets for the first time in Montenegro and, as an epilogue, had a big demonstration in front of the government building during the new president's inauguration.

The conflict within the DPS marked the polarisation of the society, first in accordance with the party division and alliance with Milošević, and lately for or against Montenegrin independence/community with Serbia. Since neither of the two parties which emerged from the dissolution of the DPS had a convincing majority anymore, it had to come from opposition lines. For this support, the opposition had demanded a minimum assurance for democratic elections.<sup>40</sup> Only the Socialist People's Party did not sign the agreement. The most important provision of this agreement was that Montenegro had to once again become one constituency while the electoral threshold was set at 3%. As far as parliamentary elections were concerned, the coalition led by the DPS won 49.5% of the votes, while SNP became the second strongest party with 36%.

### **Elections in 2001, 2002 and 2003**

After the 2001 parliamentary elections, which spanned 81% of the registered voters, the two strongest blocks led by the DPS and SNP received roughly the same number of votes. However, the LSCG provided a minority to DPS and the coalition around it, with the promise of calling for a referendum on the independence of Montenegro. Still, after the DPS signed the already mentioned Belgrade Agreement, the LSCG, as well as the smaller coalition partner of the DPS, the SDP, left the government.

The 2002 parliamentary elections were very successful for the ruling coalition, which succeeded in winning a sufficient majority of votes that was not dependent on other political entities. This election cycle also included the presidential election in 2003. It should be noted that this election could not be organised on two occasions during 2002, due to the boycott of most of the opposition. Thereafter, the electoral law was changed and the requirement that half of the electorate had to vote (50% of the total electorate) was excluded from the law. The election was finally held in May 2003. Filip Vujanović, the DPS candidate won by two-thirds. The only opposition party that had the candidate in these elections was the Liberal Party, and one independent candidate was also involved.

### **Elections in 2006–2009**

Parliamentary elections 2006 were the first after the restoration of independence. Consequently, all as expected, referendum topics were central within the electoral campaign. The SNP lost its primacy, and its role was taken over by the Serbian List (Srpska lista) headed by Andrija Mandić. The new party, the Movement for Change (Pokret za promjene,

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<sup>40</sup> Agreement on the minimum of principles for the development of democratic infrastructure.

PzP), not active during the referendum, achieved a notable result during these elections winning 11 seats. The coalition of the Liberal and the Bosniak Party, as well as a part of the Albanian parties, has joined the parliament.

Two years later (2008), the first presidential elections in independent Montenegro were held. Filip Vujanović again was at the head of the DPS, who already succeeded in the first round.<sup>41</sup> Parliamentary elections in 2009 brought a similar epilogue. As for the topics that dominated the campaign, national issues were still in the focus alongside the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. DPS has continued to argue for itself that it was the only safe choice to preserve Montenegro's independence, its path to the EU and NATO, along with the economic progress. In addition, the list led by the DPS also comprised some of the minorities' parties, which further strengthened their position.

In terms of the results, it is only worth mentioning a new redistribution in the opposition, where the SNP returned to its forefront, which managed to recover a significant part of the electorate. This led to the significant fall of the PzP, as well as the successor of the former Serbian List, the New Serbian Democracy (Nova Srpska Demokratija, NOVA).

### **Protests, opposition fragmentation, coup d'état – Elections in 2012, 2013 and 2016**

With regards to the parliamentary elections in 2012, where the "Coalition for a European Montenegro", made up of the DPS, SDP and the Liberal Party, won 165,380 votes and 39 seats in the Parliament and later formed a government with minority parties. One year later, the presidential elections were much more interesting.

The opposition in Montenegro is extremely dispersive, and currently, according to the data of the Ministry of Public Administration from January 2018, 54 political parties are registered. During the presidential elections of 2013 when the opposition candidate Miodrag Lekić narrowly lost to the DPS candidate Filip Vujanović, the political scene had the outlines of a two-party system since most of the opposition was grouped around a single candidate. However, the trend of political party division continued and culminated with a record number of parties during the 2016 election. Also, during 2017, this trend continued with the membership splits within the Socialist People's Party and the Democratic Alliance – DEMOS.

In January 2016, the long-term DPS coalition partner SDP left the government but it survived thanks to the support of the Positive Montenegro (Pozitivna Crna Gora)<sup>42</sup> who left parliament after the election of that same year since it did not receive the necessary support from the citizens. The period between elections was also marked by sporadic protests (during 2015 and 2016) organised by the then strongest political group in the parliament, the Democratic Front coalition,<sup>43</sup> but they were not successful because of unclear

<sup>41</sup> His rivals were leaders of the three strongest opposition parties: the Serbian List, the Movement for Change and the Socialist People's Party.

<sup>42</sup> Established in 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Founded in 2012, it is a right-wing opposition coalition which is currently constituted by six parties including the NOVA and the PzP. Two DF leaders are being charged for involvement in a coup d'état case and the proceedings before the court are underway.

articulated demands but also the impossibility to spread the social significance of protests and make a shift from nationalistic symbols and rhetoric.

Election Day 2016 was marked by the still alleged coup d'état, which likely contributed to the narrow victory of the DPS. Opposition parties refused to participate in the parliament's work until the organisation of new elections, but part of them returned to the parliament in late 2017.<sup>44</sup>

Confidence in the electoral process has not been achieved despite some initiatives, such as the "Government of the Electoral Trust".<sup>45</sup> Its results were extremely thin due to the limited time frame in which this interim government operated (less than five months), obstruction by the government officials including non-timely access to crucial documents for oversight, the lack of coordination by the opposition parties involved in the work of this government, but also due to the provisions of the *lex specialis*, Law on the Implementation of the Agreement on Creating Conditions for Free and Fair Elections, which enabled the participation of the opposition in the government.<sup>46</sup>

### **Đukanović won the election before it started<sup>47</sup> – Presidential elections in 2018**

In the 2018 presidential election, Milo Đukanović has returned to public office. No one else from the DPS, so its highest bodies assessed, could have ensured victory in the presidential elections. And all of this unfolded after he already served six mandates as Prime Minister and one as president.<sup>48</sup> The election campaign lasted just over three weeks, as the opposition could not agree upon a common candidate, and the DPS was waiting tactically for their decision. As a result, Đukanović won 53.9% of the votes in the first round, while Mladen Bojanić, the candidate of the largest part of the opposition, won 33.4%.

## **Conclusion**

The recent Montenegrin political history and transformation of the country, as well as the ruling party, can be divided into three phases (1990–1997, 1997–2006, 2006-onwards). During this period, the same party secured its place in the centre of political life. Although the establishment of a multiparty system in 1990 introduced elements of the democratic system, the transition started with a formal breakaway from Milošević's policy in 1997. Until then, the legacy of the communist system and weak opposition infrastructure influenced the autocratic elements and practices to be more visible than democratic. However, these

<sup>44</sup> The Democratic Front and two independent MPs, while the so-called civic opposition (DEMOS, URA, Democrats) are still out of Parliament.

<sup>45</sup> A few months before the 2016 elections, ministers from the opposition controlled the line ministries for finance, interior, agriculture and labour and social welfare. The opposition also participated in the control of the state resources at the various levels, including 142 public administration posts, and, alongside the above-mentioned ministerial posts, also a deputy prime minister position. Such government was supposed to provide the minimum requirements for the free and fair elections.

<sup>46</sup> Based on this law, the control could only be carried out for 2016 data.

<sup>47</sup> MAROVIĆ 2018.

<sup>48</sup> MAROVIĆ 2018.

autocratic practices have not been eradicated yet, so it could be said that the longstanding ruling party still combines autocratic and democratic practices. The latter ones have largely been developed under the auspices of the European integration process, but the weakness of the EU conditionality policy is also reflected in the case of Montenegro. Namely, given that Montenegro has been negotiating for full membership in the EU for more than six years, the impact of democratic efforts should be more visible and tangible. Montenegro has common problems with the rest of the Western Balkans and they relate to the lack of media freedom, corruption at all levels, a strong clientelistic network, a politicised administration that prevents faster democratisation and strengthening of the rule of law. Montenegro is specific as having the same party in power since the establishment of a multiparty system, hence undemocratic practices such as party recruitment, abuse of public resources, positioning of loyal cadres, election irregularities, are even more rooted and their consequences are harder to remedy. Despite the undemocratic rule, the DPS managed to remain in power due to the transformative (primarily rhetorical) power of its leader, manipulations, shifts in politics and dispersion of the opposition.

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