

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

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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%.

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Publishing director : Pascale JOANNIN

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