

Can the outgoing President of Montenegro be beaten?

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Analysis

515, 000 Montenegrins are being called on 7th April next to vote in the 1st round of the presidential election. Outgoing Head of State Filip Vujanovic (Socialist Democratic Union, DPS) is running for office again – which has been the source of conflict amongst a share of the political classes. Filip Vujanovic was elected on 11th May 2003 President of the Republic of Montenegro. At that time Podgorica was part of the State of Serbia-Montenegro, since Montenegro regained its independence on 3rd June 2006. Filip Vujanovic was then elected as President of Montenegro on 6th April 2008. He clinched 51.89% of the vote and won the election in the first round ahead of Andrija Mandic (Serb People's Party, SNS), who won 19.55% of the vote.

Reminder of the results of the 1st round of voting in the Presidential election on 6th April 2008 in Montenegro.

Turnout: 68.20%

| Candidates | No. of votes won (1st round) | % of votes won (1st round) |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Filip Vujanovic (Socialist Democratic Union, DPS) | 171 118 | 51.89 |
| Andrija Mandic (Serb People's Party, SNS) | 64 473 | 19.55 |
| Nebojsa Medojevic (Movement for Change, PzP) | 54 874 | 16.64 |
| Srdan Milic (Socialist People's Party, SNP) | 39 916 | 11.92 |

Source : Agence France-Presse

The Social Democratic Party (SDP), a loyal ally of the DPS of Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic (both parties have governed Montenegro together since 1998) was against Filip Vujanovic running for the Presidency a third time. Its leader Ranko Krivokapic, the long-standing rival of the Montenegrin head of State, believes it unconstitutional and has appealed to the Constitutional Court about this. Montenegrin fundamental law (Article 86) allows the President of Montenegro, whose function is mainly an honorary one, to undertake two terms in office lasting five years consecutively. According to the DPS which has led the country since the start of the 1990's the Head of State's first term which started before the independence of Montenegro should not be taken into account.

On 15th February last the Montenegro Constitutional Court took a decision, 6 votes against one, and allowed Filip Vujanovic to stand in the presidential election again. Ranko Krivokapic announced on 8th March that in view of this decision his party would boycott the election.

The outgoing Head of State launched his electoral campaign at the end of February. He promoted the fact that he would work together with the Milo Djukanovic's government whilst in his opinion a victory on the part of his

main rival, Miodrag Lekic, the leader of the Democratic Front, a coalition of several opposition parties would destabilise Montenegro. Filip Vujanovic accused his rival of having been against an independent Montenegro during a referendum on 21st May 2006. "Miodrag Lekic declared that union with Serbia was our future," he stressed. The latter was affected however by documents published by the daily *Dan* on 15th February last which revealed how the DPS places its supporters in public posts.

Miodrag Lekic, leader of the Democratic Front, the coalition created for the general elections on 14th October 2012 and which includes the New Serb Democracy (NOVA) led by Andrija Mandic, the Movement for Change (PzP) led by Nebojsa Medojevic and the Pensioners', Invalids' and Social Justice Party is the main opposition candidate. Former Foreign Minister and Ambassador for Yugoslavia in Italy supported by the People's Socialist Party (SNP) led by Srdjan Milic, Lekic is however standing as an independent. Miodrag Lekic launched his electoral campaign on 4th March last.

Srdjan Milic's decision to support the Democratic Front

might mean an *approchement* between the Serb parties. This is a threat to Filip Vujanovic, who is confident though about his re-election. The longevity of the DPS in office can be explained in the main by the opposition parties' inability to agree on a common programme. "A union candidate would be a good choice but the opposition leaders need to trust each other more;" stresses Daliborka Uljarevic, director of the Civic Education Centre in Podgorica. If it has not been achieved yet one step forwards has been taken however. Miodrag Lekic also advised the outgoing Head of State to wait for the election result before celebrating his victory.

Political analysts believe that Filip Vujanovic is being over confident about his ability to win again as Head of State and stress that he might suffer the same fate as his Serb counterpart Boris Tadic (Democratic Party, DS), who on 6th May last, was beaten by Tomislav Nikolic (Progressive Serb Party, SNS) in the second round of the Serb Presidential election.

This is all the more true since Montenegro is experiencing a difficult period. On 28th January last the unions demonstrated before the Skupstina, the only chamber in Parliament, against the government's project to increase income tax make by three points affecting all salaries over 400 €/month in order to counter the budgetary deficit (which totals 128.6 millions € for the first eleven month of 2012 against 80.8 millions € for the same period in 2011). Podgorica introduced a flat rate on VAT, income and company tax set at 9% in 2010. The average monthly salary is 480€.

Rade Bojovic, a member of the Fair Montenegro Politi-

cal Club wants to stand as an independent. In an interview granted to the daily *Pobjeda*, he said nothing would change if Filip Vujanovic wins the election. "However if Miodrag Lekic wins the election there would certainly be further general elections. We shall have a political crisis. But if I win there will be neither additional turbulence nor a political crisis. My role would be a constructive one," he said. However he has not yet presented to the Electoral Commission the 7,500 signatures required to be allowed to stand in the presidential election. Miodrag Lekic presented 8,200 signatures, Filip Vujanovic, 13,500.

Positive Montenegro (PCG), a new centre left party founded in May 2012 by Darko Pajovic, has chosen to boycott the presidential election. The parties representing the minorities living in the country are associated with the DPS and are not putting a candidate forward in the election. Mehmet Bardhi, Chairman of the Democratic Alliance for Montenegro (DSCG), did however say he wanted to use the opportunity provided by the election to achieve a review of the electoral law in support of an increase in the number of Albanian speaking MPs seats in Parliament. He is demanding the guarantee that this promise will be kept before supporting the outgoing Head of State.

Candidates have until 18th March next to register with the Electoral Commission.

The result of the presidential election on 7th April next is far from settled and it is the most uncertain that Montenegro has ever experienced. If none of those standing succeed in winning the absolute majority on 7th April, a second round will take place on 21st April.

Filip Vujanovic is re-elected as President of Montenegro

Results

Outgoing Head of State Filip Vujanovic (Democratic Socialist Movement, DPS) was re-elected as President of Montenegro on 7th April. He won 51.21% of the vote against 48.79% which went to his only challenger, former Foreign Minister, Miodrag Lekic. Leader of the New Democratic Front, a coalition created last year on the occasion of the general elections held on 14th October 2012 which brings together New Serb Democracy (NSD) led by Andrija Mandic, the Movement for Change (GZP) led by Nebojsa Medojevic and the Pensioners' Handicapped and Social Justice Party, Miodrag Lekic was running however as an independent candidate. The election was an extremely close one with both candidates still claiming victory nearly 24 hours after the closure of the polling stations. Only 7000 votes (out of a total 327,000) separated the two candidates said Ivan Kalezic, head of the electoral commission.

Supported by the DPS, Filip Vujanovic did not however enjoy the support of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), a loyal ally of Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic's party (both parties have governed Montenegro together since 1998). The SDP was against what it deemed to be a third term in office for Filip Vujanovic as President of the country; the party's leader Ranko Krivokapic, the Montenegrin Head of State's eternal rival took legal action with the Constitutional Court over this issue.

Filip Vujanovic was elected on 11th May 2003 as president of Montenegro of the State of Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro only regained independence on 3rd June 2006. Filip Vujanovic was then elected as President of independent Montenegro on 6th April 2008 in the 1st round with 51.89% of the vote. On 15th February last the Constitutional Court gave the green light to the outgoing Head of State to stand for a further mandate in the Presidential election. As a result of

this the Social Democratic Party chose to boycott the election.

Montenegrin Fundamental Law (article 97) allows the Head of State, whose function is mainly honorary, to undertake two consecutive five year mandates. The DPS, which has led the country since the start of the 1990's, argued that the head of State's first mandate started before the independence of Montenegro and therefore this could not be taken into account.

Only two candidates were running for the Presidential election. Rade Bojovic, a member of the political club, Fair Montenegro, did not manage to present the 7,500 signatures necessary to run in the election. Just over 2/3 of Montenegrins (63.90%) turned out to ballot i.e. -4.30 points in comparison with the presidential election on 6th April 2008.

Presidential election results on 7th April 2013 in Montenegro

Turnout: 63.90%

| Candidates | No. of votes won (1st round) | % of votes won (1st round) |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Filip Vujanovic (Democratic Socialist Union, DPS) | 161 940 | 51,21 |
| Miodrag Lekic (New Democratic Front) | 154 290 | 48,79 |

Source : Central electoral commission of Monténégro

Political analyst Dubravka Uljarevic of the *think tank* Center for Civic Education attributes the longevity in office of the DPS to its unequivocal control over the civil service and the financial institutions. "It gives them a strength to which the opposition, a victim of its own weaknesses and a lack of international support, cannot respond," she declared.

"The president of Montenegro is not a major personality but the fact that he is elected by universal suffrage does increase his credibility however," declared political scientist Milos Besic. The editor in chief of the weekly *Monitor*, Drasko Djuranovic, has however said that Montenegro was entering a period of tension and crisis during which the opposition will challenge the

legitimacy of the president as well as the coalition in office.

Aged 59, Filip Vujanovic is a graduate of the University of Belgrade. A qualified lawyer, he started his political career in 1993 and was appointed Justice Minister (1993-1995) then Home Minister (1995-1998) in the governments led by Milo Djukanovic. In 1997, when the DPS broke into two, one part led by a close ally of former Serb President Slobodan Milosevic, Momir Bulatovic, and the other led by Milo Djukanovic; Filip Vujanovic remained loyal to the latter. In 1998, he was appointed Prime Minister - a post he occupied until the general elections on 20th October 2002.

Presidential election in Montenegro 9th April 2013

After the invalidation of two presidential elections in which he had easily taken the lead (invalidated due to lack of turnout: less than half of the registered electorate voted), Filip Vujanovic finally took the Presidency of Montenegro of the State of the Serbia and Montenegro on 11th May 2003. He became the first head of State of independent Montenegro on 6th April 2008, a post which he was re-elected to on 7th April.

Filip Vujanovic has promised to work towards the establishment of *"a democratic, developed Montenegro where citizens will live better, which will be a good,*

reliable neighbour in the region and above all a State that will soon be part of the EU and NATO." He promised to work to *"attract foreign investment, create jobs and increase citizens' salaries."*

Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic announced that projects in support of the rule of Law and the fight to counter organised crime and corruption requested by the European Commission in order to open the chapters 23 and 24 of membership negotiations will be ready by the end of April. *"We hope that negotiations on these two chapters will open in the second half of the year,"* he declared.

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