



Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro Political briefing:
Post-Djukanovic Montenegro?
Ivica Bakota**

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin

Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping



1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.



+36 1 5858 690



office@china-cee.eu



china-cee.eu

Post-Djukanovic Montenegro?

What is behind Djukanovic s Wind of Change

The talk on sovereignism in Montenegro has increased considerably after the inauguration of President Milo Djukanovic. To maintain his informal power over state structures, fulfill his descending political career and protect his ailing business empire, Mr. Djukanovic positioned himself as the patron of sovereignism. Several statements made by Djukanovic - refusing to align with government`s preemptive obedience to the EU, ice-breaking messages to Russia, calling against foreign tutored meddling in the media, etc. - have been interpreted as the result of his growing tension with the increasingly normative the EU has become in the accession negotiations phase.

After some reports on divergent statements coming from PM Markovic over the cooperation with the EU regarding the protection of journalists and media freedom, there were opinions seeing the rift within the regime`s Bastille - ruling DPS party. The “progressive” journalists and some NGO voices came to the government`s aid - keeping in mind their own interests - by warning of possible informal (intra-party) and formal (from President`s office) meddling in reform processes the government has undertaken in the last months. President Djukanovic and PM Markovic denied any indications on possible inner-party split; however, both have also declined to send appeasing messages on “business as usual” or “futile wishful thinking of the opposition”, hinting that there must be something going on.

Even though some observers didn`t exclude the possibility that the divergence is pre-arranged tactics in the relations with the EU, the statement given by Markovic in May has actually revealed the problem that overcomes possible conflicts in the core leadership. Markovic`s statement which juxtaposed Djukanovic and himself versus “people without quality and potential” indicates

a deep structural problems within DPS - political continuity, self-preservation and repeated difficulty in picking the heirs to the throne.

In the early post-independence period, “revolutionary generation” of DPS gathered around Djukanovic, S. Marovic and Co. were very experienced politicians to bring peaceful dissolution from Serbia and inter-ethnic peace but also fairly young to keep up with the pace of modernization and meet the challenges of a small and prospering nation. Like every revolutionary generation their source of power relied on a small circle of old comrades that effectively imposed control by introducing a “fresh blood” to an archaic and personal network which have overseen the business and the state-building efforts. In terms of the age structure, DPS was never shy to put young people on the top positions - having several MPs under thirties, PM Luksic in his early thirties - and bringing the deceptive scent of juvenilocracy to Montenegro’s politics. Electing Markovic, long time director of ANB (National Security Agency) and one from the circle of “old comrades”, as a party’s choice for the prime minister in 2016, unsuccessful quest for the right presidential candidate in early 2018 as well as Djukanovic’s frequent calls for “leadership selection” within young party cadres signaled that DPS has encroached into reproduction crisis. It might be debatable are there at all right people able to stand on the shoulders of the “revolutionary generation” and will DPS as a “state apparatus pretending to be a political party” disappear after the departure of Djukanovic and other elders; nevertheless, more pressing issue right now is to find the people who can lead the country into the EU. Even though it might seem easy for successful winner of several elections in a row to contain the ambitions of weak opposition and claim the achievements in the accession negotiations as an ultimate source of legitimacy for the generation of a young politicians to come, the authoritarian (and also criminal) mortgage of the old structures might also be too heavy burden to carry until the accession date. The young wing of DPS are aware of concurrent desire from some circles in the EU to see post-Djukanovic Montenegro. It is anxiety of (probably) upcoming political patricide that like

Sanader's arrest in Croatia might only give impetus for finishing the accession negotiations and bid farewell to a long period of the transition.

After a month since the first signs of the sovereignist aberrations in Djukanovic's new political course, it might be more correct to side with those opinions that instead of the rift see the tactics behind the divergent positions on the EU. Yet, where awakened sovereignism can this time take Djukanovic and what chances he stands in trying again to assume balancing attitude with the EU? Far-sighted observers instead of concerns with bottlenecks in due reforms rather see a swan song of Djukanovic's fading political career. Indication on this was sent in last month after current opposition leaders, Becic from the Democrats and Abazovic from URA, went to Brussels to discuss ending the boycott in the parliament with Enlargement Commissioner Hahn and came back with single political message that Djukanovic is not right man for European Montenegro. It is hardly important whether it was hinted by Hahn or even whether it suggests haphazard government transition in the future, it is the shifting narrative of the European integrations that starts focusing on Montenegro's "silent chapter" in the accession negotiations, i.e. departure of Djukanovic before entering the EU.

Between business and politics: a long history of Djukanovic's comebacks

In the mid of the Kosovo crisis of 1999, Europe embraced Milo Djukanovic, an independence-minded young politician who openly started to espouse anti-Milosevic sentiment and had a courage to openly call his nationalist policies an utter failure. Under his leadership, Montenegro was (mostly) spared NATO bombardment, and obtained de facto political and economic independence. The pact with the EU after toppling Milosevic helped Djukanovic to legitimize sovereignist movement and customize the path towards the independence. Djukanovic monopolized pro-European independentism and severed the channels for through which the voice of genuine anti-regime opposition could reach the EU.

The EU was always well aware of Djukanovic's authoritarian ambitions, or at least held his façade Europeanism and criminal connections in the hindsight, but they were never able to pull off a break with Djukanovic as he proved to be resilient in staying on power as he was resourceful in acquiescing his contenders. In the post-independence period, the EU straightforwardly started to think of transition of power that should occur in Montenegro and tried to marginalize Djukanovic immediately after the referendum in 2006.

It was believed that independentism championed by DPS already served its purpose and the EU felt the opportunity to use pro-European sentiment to weaken Djukanovic and diminish or moderate the ruling DPS party. Djukanovic swiftly played along, only few months after the independence he cited as "being tired of politics" (a convenient reason he would abundantly use in his political career) and declined to run for a new term as a prime minister. This was his first King's gambit with the EU: he kept his leadership in the party, made internal compromise on promoting new faces in the government, preserved his ultimate authority and even grew more unshakable by offering ideological and political concessions to pro-European political forces. He entered into stable coalition with SDP, paid a lip service to pro-democratization efforts, assumed the position of defender of Montenegro's sovereignty against various unionist, pro-Serb and conservative forces and returned back every time Montenegro required statesman for crucial state-building decisions.

Following closely EU policy regarding the Kosovo, advancing EU and NATO integration processes mostly ahead of the neighboring countries was good enough for achieving visa liberalization and signing SAA agreement with the EU. Yet, criminal charges from Italian court were still following him even though he successfully claimed his diplomatic immunity. Brussels' circles still occasionally poked his political longevity linked with peculiar connections with Montenegro's underground, so he realized in order to steer away from "silent condition" of European partners and satisfy the growing Western-bound expectations of Montenegro's population he needs to create new sources of

legitimacy. The old informal structures through which he effectively controlled power saw pro-Serb opposition and the concurrent conservative forces as a threat but did not object to have them stage a comeback on the second and third parliamentary elections. Instead, DPS took advantage of the European conflict with pro-Serbian political parties to become only reliable political force in Montenegro. The anti-NATO protests and frequent outpours of dissatisfaction with country's support for European stance over Kosovo frightened Brussels and tilted the scale back in favor of DPS.

To restore its credibility after the coup attempt in 2016, Djukanovic stepped down again from the position of prime minister and decided to go back to his private business, leaving the country in the safe embrace of the West. It looked as an easy transfer of power after Montenegro contained popular anti-NATO mobilization and advanced in accession negotiations. But the "primaries" in early 2018 showed not only that DPS has no right heir but young stand-ins for presidential candidate were not reliable for the position, so he didn't have an option but to return again as a presidential candidate.

After his second premiership in the independent Montenegro (fifth in his political career) he became a president of Montenegro for a second time. Unlike all his previous high posts, this term in office is ostensibly void of big political projects like signing Belgrade Declaration, convening independence referendum, signing SAA agreement or joining NATO. Montenegro is on a slow and gradual course of accession that could be dramatized if the country has to prove to have a functioning democracy, independent judiciary and rule of law. His political mission this time is for the first time on the opposite side of the progress and without clear source of the legitimacy is even symbolically perceived as immanent contradiction with "Europeanization" of Montenegro's politics. Will this activate the "silent chapter"? Very likely, if there are no new coup attempts, anti-constitutional elements and foreign conspiracies.

Without reinventing his role he will soon become expendable figure. The logic behind this classical tragedy of power is zero-sum formula symbolically

enacted in other authoritarianisms-turned-democracies: there can be no place for Djukanovic in European Montenegro. He has to symbolically die so Montenegro may enter Europa. Does Djukanovic know that he is tragic embodiment of political catharsis Montenegro has to overcome. Maybe. But he still shows to be more concerned with pragmatic outcomes of his decisions than on the new epic poetry that could be tailored after his deeds in hundreds of years. He seems content in sincere belief that there is no Europa at the end of a transformative journey through which he guided Montenegro, only political approximations of ideal and repeated circle of political deaths and resurrections to obtain it. His lasting political career will thus depend on his bet that Brussels cannot pull *deus ex machina* move. But is that the fate of a tragic figure that laughs at gods before the looming end?