



# Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro political briefing:**  
**Political summary – Montenegro 2018**  
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## **Political summary – Montenegro 2018**

The events that marked the first half of the year are certainly the presidential and local elections held in April and May 2018. During the pre-election campaigns, various accusations, ambitious projects and a glittering future could be heard by the political parties.

Since introduction of the multiparty system in Montenegro it was seventh presidential elections. Citizens chose between the seven candidates who competed for the presidency of the state. During the campaign, which lasted three weeks, various programs, projects and promises were presented. Although the opposition candidates announced the victory and the organization of the second round of elections, the largest number of votes - 53.9% was achieved by Milo Djukanovic, who for the second time entered the presidency. Mr. Djukanovic had already won the other candidates in the first round. Namely, Mr. Djukanovic achieved significantly more votes than candidate of the most of the opposition, Mr. Mladen Bojanic, but also Mrs. Draginja Vuksanovic who was the first women candidate for president in the Montenegro's history.

One of the characteristics of the presidential election is the unequal opposition and its inability to agree to a joint appearance. Such approach of the opposing parties, to the presidential candidate Mr. Djukanovic represented the wind at the back and advantage in the elections. Also, the opposition was characterized by modest expectations and ambitions that could be heard during the pre-election campaign. Usually, victory in the election, by opposition, was seen in the second round. It is possible that such an approach influenced the voter's decisions. Among others, the results of the president' elections showed citizens' commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, taking into account the votes of candidates who are in favor of such a policy in their program.

After the presidential elections, the ruling coalitions and the opposition at the state level measured the strengths in the local elections that took place in May 2018. Namely, the local elections were held in the capital city, Podgorica and 11 other municipalities in Montenegro. During the pre-election campaign, political parties promised the implementation of various programs and projects. Namely, during the pre-election campaign political parties were more focused on solving different municipal problems. However, although it was a shift in the quality of the pre-election campaign, often the projects presented in the campaign were unrealistic from the point of view of their realization, taking into account constraint municipal

budgets. Certainly the most important issue among the political parties was the conquest of the authorities in Podgorica. On the one hand, the opposition offered the construction of a tram, zoo, national cuisine, as well as free legalization of constructions. On the other hand, the DPS offered a continuation of the policy of managing Podgorica from the previous period.

Since that terms of presidential and local elections were in short period, there were overlapping of pre-election campaigns. Similar to the presidential election, there was an idea among opposition parties about a joint appearance in local elections to win the largest political party on the state level. However, the dissolution of the opposition parties at the local level was more pronounced. Thus disunited appearance of the opposition parties led to a disjointed voters, less voter turnout which further influenced the strengthening of the DPS. Therefore, local elections have shown that the dissociation of opposition parties is not a strategy that leads to the achievement of desired results. Namely, of the twelve municipalities where the elections were held, DPS won an absolute majority in Podgorica, Danilovgrad, Bijelo Polje, Pljevlja, Savnik and Zabljak, where it can form the government independently. In cooperation with the coalition partner from the state level, the DPS established authority in another three municipalities: Bar, Kolasin and Golubovci. In addition, in coalition with Bosniak party in Rozaje and Social Democrats of Montenegro in Plav, DPS has took a part in the local governments in these two municipalities.

After the persuasive victory at the presidential election a month earlier, the success of the DPS in local elections and the conquest of authority in Podgorica with almost 50% of the votes indicated stability of citizens' confidence. In addition, the Montenegrin political scene is characterized by a large number of political parties. According to the data, 54 political parties have been registered in Montenegro, which puts Montenegro at the top position in the region, given the number of politicians and political parties per capita. New parties are formed mainly within the opposition block due to the breakdown within the party. By establishing new parties, as well as their short life influence the overflow of voters between the parties. This overflow of voters will continue to pose a challenge to the opposition in the path of strengthening them on the political scene and competing with the current ruling coalition.

In addition to local and presidential elections, what can be recognized as a political reality in 2018 in Montenegro is the low level of confidence in the electoral framework and the long-standing **parliamentary boycott** of most of the opposition parties that has lasted since the parliamentary elections of 2016. It is clear to analysts that the return of the political debate in the Parliament was more the result of the international community's pressure and

Brussels than the consequence of increasing the responsibility of all political actors. It is precisely the increase in the responsibility of all political actors, something also pointed out in the EU Progress Report on Montenegro for 2018. Although part of the opposition returned to the Parliament in early 2018, and part after certain activities on the reform of electoral legislation at the end of 2018, there seems to still be plenty of room for improvement of parliamentary dialogue and control process.

It was precisely the **reform of the electoral legislation** and related events that characterized the second part of 2018, especially the last quarter. The reform of the electoral legislation was initiated with the aim of improving the electoral environment, and further strengthening the confidence of citizens in the electoral process and changing the electoral legislation. However, it is clear that such defined goal is the consequences of pressure and criticism from Brussels. Due to the public interest and initiative from EU, The Committee for the Reform of Electoral and Other Legislation was formed in October 2018 which was first step toward the crucial change of electoral legislation which is of crucial importance for Montenegro. The committee has 14 members, seven of which are members of the parliamentary majority and seven members of parliamentary opposition. In the work of the Board in the status of an associate member can participate representatives of the non-governmental sector and the academic community, without the right to decide.

This seemed as a good progress toward cooperation. Immediately after this, part of the opposition returned to Parliament, and delegated their representatives in numerous Parliamentary bodies. It seems that initiated cooperation between ruling and opposition parties in 2018 is spurred by the processes of integration, rather than political will. Despite significant improvements, which are more extorted than the result of genuine political will and cooperation, Montenegro's political scene remains "fragmented, polarized and marked by a lack of political dialogue", especially in democratic institutions such as Parliament. And more than it was at the beginning of 2018, when such an assessment was provided by the EU. Such a claim is not only contributed by the fact that the set of laws was passed in Parliament without prior public consultation, which was recognized and criticized by the EU. This claim is supported by the latest developments on the political scene. Namely, some **opposition leaders are imprisoned** recently due to the speech unfounded on the facts, and as response, opposition cancelled membership in the work of Parliamentary bodies recently reestablished by legislation reform. Instead, today we have demonstrations caused by imprisoning certain politicians and even more fragmented and polarized political scene compared to the beginning

of the year. This also confirms that changes of the electoral legislation are not real result of good political will. Such will did not exist even in cooperation between opposition parties. In addition to the general disagreement with the ruling parties, during 2018, disagreements were more pronounced than ever between the opposition parties, so certain initiatives on the unity of the opposition, or at least one of its parts, were previously condemned to failure.

Hence, the work of the abovementioned committee is questionable because currently, none of the committee goals cannot be fulfilled. Stagnation in the dialogue resulted in the lack of activities on optimization of the overall environment in which the next election cycles will be held, while, implementation of recommendations of OSCE on the occasion of the 2016 parliamentary elections and 2018 presidential elections will still wait. It would be interesting to see the next EU progress report on Montenegro, since not a lot is done on the implementation of recommendations the previous report. And above the all, the trust of public in the electoral process is not strengthened.