



Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro social briefing:
What happens with the civilisation values in Montenegro?
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What happens with the civilisation values in Montenegro?

The events that marked the month of May are a reflection of social problems related to a much longer period of time. This is related to the fact that Montenegro is not anymore considered as democratic country (after many years), as well as the problem of intolerance, and desecration of monuments erected by civilizational achievements and ideals, such as the fight against fascism.

Montenegro is no longer a democratic state

For the first time since 2003, Montenegro no longer belongs to democratic states. This is the result of the report "Nations in Transit"¹ by the non-governmental organization Freedom House, a document which explored and described the way of governing in 29 countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The 2020 report classifies Montenegro in the category of governments in transition or hybrid regimes - in which power is based on authoritarianism as a result of incomplete democratic change. Such a government, in one state, can simultaneously carry out political repression and call for elections.

The problems that led to such a poor result for Montenegro are, above all, those related to the judiciary. The report states that negative trends and shortcomings in independent work have been noted in this area. In that sense, researchers have recorded worrying cases of scandals in the judiciary and the prosecutor's office. The worries are further intensified by the fact that the mandate of the members of the Judicial Council is expiring. Report states that in 2019 and 2020, politicians undermined judicial independence and the rule of law, resulting in score declines, not just in Montenegro, but also in some EU countries. The report also analyses problems in Montenegrin parliamentary practice. Report states that "full or partial parliamentary boycotts by opposition parties... disrupted the work of parliaments and signaled a lack of fairness and legitimacy."²

¹ The Freedom House report - "Nations in transit" is an annual review of the democratic reforms in mentioned countries, and has been published since 1995.

² Freedom House (2020): Nations in Transit, Dropping the Democratic Facade, p 3.

Freedom House states that many leaders of Central and Eastern Europe no longer pretend to care about democracy and the rule of law. Montenegro left the group of democratic states after a decade spent among semi-consolidated democracies³. It is particularly worrying that Montenegro has fallen behind in the fight against corruption. Because, in recent years, the field of corruption has been emphasized by the European Union as the biggest weakness of Montenegro. Thus, Montenegro is classified in the group of hybrid regimes. Nevertheless, it is a question of methodological correctness of the calculations of the index measured by Freedom House. Various analyses have indicated bias in evaluation, especially between socialist and other countries.⁴ Nevertheless, concerns remain given that the real problems could be brought by the message that Montenegro is becoming an autocratic state.

Dangerous incidents caused by some religious and political leaders in Montenegro

Although the ban on public gatherings was still in force due to measures prescribed by the National Coordination Body for Infectious Diseases (due to the corona virus pandemic), representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church called for a liturgy on the day of the famous saint - St. Basil of Ostrog. In that way, the safety of people is endangered because thousands of citizens gathered at the liturgy, at a time when the virus was completely controlled by the great efforts of state health institutions. It is problematic that such an event has been politicized again, because it seems to be more the work of the pro-Serbian opposition in Montenegro, which has openly called for violations of health measures. The call to organize a gathering came with clear messages from many politicians that the spiritual and historical heritage cannot be destroyed by the "so-called measures of the National Coordination Body".

Therefore, the call for a public gathering by politicians can be assessed as a classic political manipulation hidden under the veil of a religious gathering. And that is a dangerous manipulation because it seems that the ultimate goal is not to satisfy the needs of the citizens, but political destabilization in a very delicate moment. At the very least, such behavior points to irrational and irresponsible behavior of individuals, with possible hopes of gaining political profit. But before any public appearance in such a situation, the question must be asked: at what price, and who pays that price? Has the effort and work of dedicated health workers in the

³ Albania, Serbia and Montenegro recorded the largest declines among Balkan countries.

⁴ For example, Mainwaring et.al (2001) shows that index calculated by Freedom House has some systematic biases in sense that scores for leftist were tainted by political considerations and changes in scores are sometimes driven by changes in their criteria rather than changes in real conditions.

suppression of the coronavirus in the previous two months been made meaningless by the invitation to public gatherings? And the results of the hard work of everyone in the health care system (which was previously especially disputed) are such that in May, Montenegro officially became the first European country without coronavirus patients (68 days, from the first recorded case in the country). If we add to that the fact that Montenegro was the last European country to which the virus was imported, then that indicates a quality response of the health system.

In any case, the religious (political) gathering resulted in the arrest and release of priests, who, however, seem to be the collateral damage of the politicization of church issues. Undoubtedly, such events are likely to influence further actualization and create space for a new politicization of issues that in their essence should be social, not political.

Attack on anti-fascist values - a reflection of decades of social problems in Montenegro

The theme that dominated Montenegrin society during May is an event that points to serious social problems, above all the growth of ultra-nationalism and fascism. Namely, the plaque was broken on the monument in the place where the decision to raise the anti-fascist people's uprising in July 1941⁵ was made. The message for society is clear: the destruction of such monuments is an attempt to destroy the achievements of civilization and achievements reflected in the struggle for freedom, multinational harmony, tolerance and everything that Montenegro could be proud of for centuries. However, the question arises: where did such an act of attack on the values of anti-fascism come from? What mind could be ready for the attack on the monument to the Montenegrin partisan communists who decided to ignite the spark of freedom in enslaved Europe? It is a problem that has been "fed and matured" for years and, even, for decades. A cursory analysis could suggest that this act has to do with the dissatisfaction of individuals due to the recent enactment of the Freedom of Religion Act. But still, the roots of the problem seem to be much deeper. The problem is that the values of anti-fascism have been neglected for decades, and the reactions of the authorities have been "lukewarm" to the flourishing of various nationalisms and chauvinisms. Insufficient strictness and involvement of the competent bodies and institutions allowed the proven helpers and servants of fascists and Nazis, war criminals, and thus criminal ideologies to be promoted and glorified through various tabloids, media and propaganda. Such a situation leads to the

⁵ The Montenegrin anti-fascist uprising of July 13, 1941 was a nationwide uprising, and was recorded in history as the largest in occupied Europe at that time.

formation of new generations, impacting them at the age when they need to mature as people and form their attitudes and value systems. Historical experience warns. The former Yugoslavia fell apart on the basis of flourishing nationalism and clerical fascism.

This attack on the "foundation" of Montenegro as a state that has fought for the ideal of freedom for centuries, means an attack on the security of every individual in Montenegro. Because fascism survives on divisions, conflicts. And there are too many of them in Montenegro. National, religious, political... These divisions correspond only to those who see in it exclusively a hidden unhealthy personal interest, whether it is a matter of concealing one's own corrupt actions, realizing illegal material benefits, or something else.

Therefore, the absence of reaction in such, and all possible subsequent similar events that glorify inhumane ideas (whether it is ultra-nationalistic public appearances in the media, desecration of monuments, or something else), would lead to further terrible collapse of Montenegro and its historical human values. Montenegrin society as a whole must not have any kind of tolerance for any signal of fascist intentions. Moreover, education about the values of anti-fascism, tolerance, interethnic harmony and coexistence seems to be needed in Montenegrin schools more than ever. The improvement of the curriculum with topics and subjects aimed at the promotion of anti-fascism and anti-fascist heritage seems to be the first and basic step in a long and continuous struggle for the preservation of civilizational values.