



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Montenegro political briefing:**  
**Montenegro got a new President and a new period of political**  
**uncertainty**  
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# Montenegro got a new President and a new period of political uncertainty

## Summary

*In the second round of presidential elections, Montenegro got a new president, who was a candidate of the “Europe Now” movement. In this way, the party of the previous President of Montenegro lost the only lever of power. In addition to the fact that the results of the elections lead to changes in the position of the president, they are also significant because of the likely change in the balance of political forces in the next parliamentary elections. However, what is even more important, it seems that the election results indicate the sensitivity of the Montenegrin political scene, which will be reflected in further polarization and instability.*

## Introduction

The State Election Commission of Montenegro announced the final results of the presidential elections, according to which the candidate of the “Europe Now” Movement won with 58.9 percent of voter support. The candidate of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), the outgoing president won 41.1 percent of the vote.<sup>1</sup> He accepted the defeat, but even after that he decided to step down as party leader.<sup>2</sup> All this is happening in anticipation of the parliamentary elections scheduled for June.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> State Election Commission of Montenegro, *Final results of the presidential elections* (available at: <https://dik.co.me/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/konacni-rezultati-2023.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Djukanovic resigns from position of DPS leader (<https://www.cdm.me/english/djukanovic-resigns-from-position-of-dps-leader/>)

<sup>3</sup> Montenegro's president sets June 11 for snap parliamentary vote (<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/montenegros-president-sets-june-11-snap-parliamentary-vote-2023-03-17/>)

## **Expected changes and an uncertain political stability**

Although the previous president of Montenegro won in the first round of the presidential elections, it was expected that all the other candidates would join forces, so his defeat in the second round was expected. It is not problematic that one person who was one of the main ones on the political scene of Montenegro for more than three decades, lost the elections and power. Moreover, in democratic societies such changes would be welcome and expected. However, the question arises, who are the forces that won and what does this mean for the further path of Montenegro as a state? Namely, the candidate of the movement with the populist name "Europe Now" won with the support of Serbian nationalists, primarily from the Democratic Front (DF) who generally do not recognize the Montenegrin state, nation, language, history and culture. So, with the support of those who would rather see Montenegro as part of the state of Serbia. Dangerous nationalist ideas about the creation of large states in the Balkans, above all Greater Serbia and Greater Albania, are again very present in the rhetoric of the politicians who are in power in those states. However, such ideas are now camouflaged under the different names, eg. "Serbian world". Unfortunately, such ideas seem to have their support within smaller independent states that are seen as prey for division. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Montenegro for several years the highest positions in the government, state institutions, education system and state companies, as well as in certain municipalities, have been held by some people who publicly boast that they see another country as their mother country, not Montenegro.<sup>4</sup>

What is most devastating in the work against the national interests of Montenegro is that the Western powers also greatly support such changes. Namely, in the free media, one can increasingly hear free intellectuals accusing US diplomacy for the period of insecurity and uncertainty in which Montenegro, but also some countries in the region, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, have fallen. Also, according to the US political analyst, the goal of the US is to create a tripartite division of regional influence, which would obviously satisfy the interest of Serbia, Albania and Croatia as the largest Balkan states, instead of border changes,

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<sup>4</sup> Local officials of Montenegro submitted accounts to the Assembly of Serbia (<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-crna-gora-demokratski-front/32219101.html>)

divisions and territorial absorption.<sup>5</sup> According to that analyst, numerous Western initiatives during the last year confirm that such a plan exists. This includes the government in Montenegro, which legitimizes the growing influence of Serbian nationalists on state institutions. According to that analysis, Serbia, through its allies and proxies, would be authorized to carry out the “Serbization” of Montenegro with the help of the Church of Serbia in Montenegro and Serbian nationalist representatives in the parliament and government. This view can be justified by the fact that the secular character of Montenegro has been greatly damaged by the current government, especially through favoring the Church of Serbia in Montenegro both financially (over 90% of all money intended for different religious communities is given to this in 2022)<sup>6</sup>, as well as logistically (through the media, etc.). In addition, the "Open Balkans" initiative would be simultaneously developed with the support of the US in order to Serbia gain deeper regional economic power.

Hence, the victory of the candidate of the Europe now movement can now bring a new period of uncertainty. The new president has already openly supported the “Open Balkans” initiative<sup>7</sup>, although a recent study by the Ministry of European Affairs showed that this initiative does not offer benefits for Montenegro, and that it is not economic, but political initiative.<sup>8</sup> The Europe Now movement itself, which will undoubtedly achieve a good result in the next parliamentary elections, is a movement that is ideologically and nationalistically diverse, but which, it seems, is driven above all by the desire to gain power at any cost. Therefore, trade with the national interests of Montenegro would not be unexpected either. This is already shown by the first statements of the new president, who is extremely close to the Church of Serbia in Montenegro. During the celebration of the victory on the streets of cities all over Montenegro, not Montenegrin but Serbian flags dominated.<sup>9</sup> This perhaps best

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<sup>5</sup> Janusz Bugajski’s Washington View: Dividing Western Balkans into Spheres of Influence (<https://istraga.ba/janusz-bugajskis-washington-view-dividing-western-balkans-into-spheres-of-influence/>)

<sup>6</sup> The SPC received EUR 585 thousand from the budget, all other religious communities less than EUR 30 thousand (<https://www.cdm.me/drustvo/spc-iz-budzeta-dobila-585-hiljada-eura-sve-ostale-vjerske-zajednice-manje-od-30-hiljada/>)

<sup>7</sup> Milatović: I think that Montenegro should become part of the Open Balkans (<https://adria.tv/vijesti/politika/milatovic-mislom-da-bi-crna-gora-trebalo-da-postane-dio-otvorenog-balkana/>)

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of European Affairs (2022). "Analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of participation in the Open Balkans" (available at: <https://www.gov.me/clanak/analiza-prednosti-i-mane-ucesca-crne-gore-u-regionalnoj-inicijativi-otvoreni-balkan>)

<sup>9</sup> Torches, sirens and Serbian flags: The atmosphere in Herceg Novi after the victory of Jakov Milatović (<https://www.danas.rs/svet/region/video-baklje-sirene-i-srpske-zastave-atmosfera-u-herceg-novom-nakon-pobede-jakova-milatovica/>)

illustrates the complexity of the situation in which Montenegro finds itself. The advocacy of some politicians from the Europe Now movement for the European agenda seems more formal for now and ends on a rhetorical level.

On the other side, part of electorate referring to Montenegrin sovereignists currently does not have the clear support of a foreign partner in any major world power, because that electorate honestly and not just declaratively sided with Ukraine in the international conflict with Russia, but that obviously means nothing to US diplomacy, which wants to attract Serbia as its partner in the Western Balkans. Therefore, it is not surprising that US diplomacy supports the “Open Balkans” initiative<sup>10</sup>.

It is certain that the victory of the candidate of the “Europe now” will now represent an additional impulse for this currently non-parliamentary movement. Therefore, the upcoming parliamentary elections could mean a complete change in the structure of power, so it is possible to expect that this movement will aspire to be the strongest political party, and therefore claim the right to the position of prime minister. However, the attitude towards the national interests of Montenegro will not change much. It should be remembered that the current leaders of this movement, while they were non-party ministers in the last government, contributed to the catastrophic state of public finances that Montenegro is facing. However, the power of the mass media, which directed its machinery against the former president of Montenegro and Montenegrin national interests, the influence of the Church of Serbia and promises of a better standard of living are something that easily went over with the mass electorate. Therefore, such an outcome should also be expected in the parliamentary elections. On the other hand, the DPS, which was the single strongest political party (even though it has not participated in government since 2020) will face new challenges to retain voters after the resignation of the previous authoritarian president. The entire rhetoric of the opponents of the DPS went in the direction of publicly portraying that party as a symbol of corruption, which largely succeeded. Therefore, after the defeat of the DPS candidate in the presidential elections, and after his resignation at the party level, the power of that party might further weaken. This would reduce the strongest pro-Montenegro party to a level where it would not be able to interfere with other parties in achieving their various goals. For some, the goals would be a greater influence in state-owned

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<sup>10</sup> Escobar: The US supports the Open Balkans (<https://press.co.me/escobar-sad-podrzavaju-otvoreni-balkan/>)

enterprises and the continuation of political employment, while for others, the undisguised goal would be to further undermine the national interests of Montenegro and the foundations of Montenegrin independence. What is possible is that part of the parties that are profiled as civil, and that closely cooperated with the detractors of the Montenegrin state and nation, will now try to win over those voters who believe that the independence of the state has been undermined and who therefore mostly voted for DPS.

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The only thing that is certain is that after the changes in the presidential elections, Montenegro has entered another period of uncertainty on the political scene, which is largely shaped by external factors. The part of the electorate (primarily secular-oriented Montenegrins) will not put up with continuous stigmatization in the media due to their support for sovereignist parties. The position of that electorate is further aggravated without the clear support of some of the foreign powers, but also without new charismatic political individuals who could personify progress in the economic and social aspects. That electorate, which is currently in a vacuum, urgently needs a new political elite capable of demonstrating through action that it is truly dedicated to the national interests of Montenegro. At the same time, it is also a chance for one of the great powers to exercise their significant influence in Montenegro through the support of that body. For now, it all boils down to demagoguery. In any case, the further uniqueness of that part of electorate and its strength will, in the coming period, largely limit the desire of certain politicians in power to behave despotically and arbitrarily.