

## Party Passport

# Montenegro

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## European Party Monitor

### General Overview

Montenegro is a small country in Southeastern Europe (total area - 13,812 sq-km, population - ca. 621,873<sup>1</sup>). Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, together with Serbia, Montenegro established the *State Union of Serbia and Montenegro*. However, in the 2006 referendum 55% of population opted for independence resulting in the peaceful dissolution of the federation. Since 2017 Montenegro is a member of NATO and since 2010 - a candidate country for EU accession<sup>2</sup>.

According to the new constitution adopted in 2007, Montenegro is an independent and sovereign state with the republican form of government (Constitution, article 1). The **Head of State** is the President (currently *Milo Đukanović*<sup>3</sup>, *socialist, pro-EU*), who is directly elected for a period of 5 years. The role of **President** is of a symbolic nature and is tasked mainly to represent the country. Executive power belongs to the government headed by the **Prime Minister** (outgoing *Duško Marković*, socialist). The parliament is unicameral, consisting of 81 seats.

Montenegro is an ethnically diverse country and recognizes several ethnic groups. Major groups include Montenegrins (45%) and Serbs (29%) represent major ethnic groups, others are Bosniaks (8.6%), Albanians (4.9%) and Croats (1%), Roma (1%)<sup>4</sup>. The Serbian Orthodox Christianity is the most popular religion in Montenegro.

The country is divided into twenty-three municipalities (opština), while each municipality may contain numerous cities and towns. Although the Central Bank of Montenegro is not part of the euro, the country uses euro as its currency.

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<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from the Statistical Office of Montenegro.

<sup>2</sup> EU has opened all 33 negotiation chapters. The last one on Competition was opened in June 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Investigative journalists network named him a person of the year in organized crime.

<sup>4</sup> The number of Montenegrins and Serbs changes from census to census-based on how people express identity. (Source: World Population Overview).

## Major Political Parties

The party system of Montenegro was shaped in the beginning of the 90s. Despite showing the characteristics of the multi-party system, in essence it favored the dominant party structure.

Since 1990 the **Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS)** has been in power for 30 years - until the 2020 parliamentary elections. DPS was formed in 1991 as the successor of the League of Communists of Montenegro and played a significant role in the formation of the coalition governments, in which it constituted the strongest actor. Led by *Milo Đukanović* (Current President of Montenegro, who served as Prime Minister in six governments), the DPS is seen as a catch-all pro-Western party, with centre-left leaning advocating for the third way economics.

While DPS remains the main opposition force and the most consolidated party with 30 parliamentary seats, the pro-governmental forces show a high degree of fragmentation since they form a wider and, in most of the cases, uneasy coalitions.

The two key coalitions that competed for the 2020 elections were the **'Coalition for the Future of Montenegro'** and **'Peace is Our Nation'**.

The first is composed of the pro-Serbian, nationalistic parties and alliances such as

Democratic Front, the conservative Popular Movement, and the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP).

**The Democratic Front** consists of three main parties: New Serb Democracy, Movement for Changes (PzP) and True Montenegro<sup>5</sup>. The **New Serb Democracy**, also known as NOVA, advocates for Serbian/Montenegrin unionism (for instance the Serbian language to be recognized by the Constitution of Montenegro as an official language). Observers note that lately the party employs a nationalist and to a certain extent a Eurosceptic discourse. It cooperates with Russian far-right Rodina and United Russia parties. It has 8 MPs.

The **Movement for Changes** (PzP) led by *Nebojša Medojević*<sup>6</sup> was founded in 2002 as a group of experts and operated as a non-governmental organization under the name Group for Changes until 2006, when it reformed itself as a political party. Party experiences an ideological shift. Initially it supported fiscal conservatism and liberalism in economic policy and atlanticism in foreign policy. Today the party cautiously supports the country's EU integration, it opposes EU's further federalization and expresses criticism towards Brussel's bureaucracy. It employs anti-Globalist and right-wing populist discourse. It has 5 MPs.

<sup>5</sup> A Right-wing political party, that received 1 seat in the 2020 elections.

<sup>6</sup> He publically endorsed Donald Trump's candidacy in the 2016 elections.

**The Democratic People's Party (DNP)** founded in 2015 from the former Socialist People's Party, when two leaders - *Milan Knežević* and *Predrag Bulatović* left the party and joined the Democratic Front Alliance as an independent group. It gained 5 seats in the 2020 elections.

Another key member of the coalition is the **Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP)** that was created in 1998 as a result of disputes within the then ruling DPS party. Led by *Vladimir Joković* it is a socially conservative party with 5 MPs in favor of EU integration but against NATO.

The second coalition 'Peace is Our Nation consists' of Democratic Montenegro, DEMOS<sup>7</sup> New Left<sup>8</sup> and PUPI (pensioners' party). The largest party in the coalition is **Democratic Montenegro**, also known as *Democrats* led by its founder *Aleksa Bečić* (Current President of Parliament). It was created in 2015 as a result of the split of the faction of the Socialist People's Party (SNP). It is also a catch-all party advocating for economic liberalism and European integration.

Ethnic politics are represented by the Bosniak, Albanian and Croatian parties that often play a significant role in forming the coalition governments. The Bosniak Party, which is affiliated to EPP, is discussed separately.

**The 2020 parliamentary elections** have been a watershed in the party landscape of Montenegro. If before ideological and programmatic differences were visible to some extent, the electoral campaign and alliances somehow united the party spectrum with a remarkably different political vision against the ruling party.

*It seems that this ideological and programmatic fusion will remain one of the key characteristics of the Montenegrin party system.*

Furthermore, the parties experience institutional and organizational challenges. The political elites are not inclusive towards the younger generation or the women leadership and parties are in urgent need of the capacity building (Expert Interview).

The high level of fragmentation of the political forces creates significant challenges in terms of creating a stable political landscape. There is a wide agreement that the change of the 30-year rule represents a significant democratic victory. However, the challenges of the transition process from the dominant party system to looser governance should be cautiously observed not to witness an emergence of a 'feckless opposition'<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> In 2015 when *Miodrag Lekić* split from the Democratic Front (DF) and formed a moderate right-wing party.

<sup>8</sup> A Minor center-left political party founded from the citizens' movement.

<sup>9</sup> This term is borrowed from Thomas Carothers (the End of the Transition Paradigm, 2002).

## Electoral History (past 15 years)

The electoral threshold is 3%.

**In September 2006 parliamentary elections** the Coalition for a European Montenegro<sup>10</sup> of the incumbent Prime Minister *Milo Đukanović* won 81 seats, while the opposition blocs gained 34 seats in total (Serbian List<sup>11</sup> - 12, Socialist People's Party and Movement for Changes - 11 each). The Bosniak party campaigned with the Liberals gaining in total 3 seats. The campaign was dominated mainly by the discourse on prevalent unemployment, EU integration and criticism towards the performance of the state institutions. Whereas the government campaigned on the successful independence referendum and the country's international recognition.

The first presidential elections after Montenegro's independence took place in **April 2008**. The incumbent President *Filip Vujanović* (*he held various high governmental positions*) secured the victory with 52% of the votes. The opposition failed to nominate a common candidate, which resulted in the fragmented process of separate nominations by almost every opposition party<sup>12</sup>.

**In March 2009 early parliamentary elections were called.** According to the new constitution adopted in 2007, the new elections had to be held by the end of 2009<sup>13</sup>. Holding early elections allegedly was an agreement between the opposition and the deputy Prime Minister to better prepare the EU accession talks with full-mandate state institutions. *Đukanović's* ruling coalition of four parties claimed victory with 48 seats. The opposition was seeking to take advantage of the resentment generated by the Kosovo recognition. They failed to make tangible political gains also partially due to their incapacity to forge coalitions. The Socialist People's Party gained 16 seats. The *New Serb Democracy* - 8 seats and Movement for Changes - 5 seats.

**In October 2012** the early parliamentary elections took place<sup>14</sup>. A coalition led by the *Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)*, which included the *Social Democratic Party (SDP)* and the *Liberal Party (LP)* gained victory with 39 seats. With the slogan 'Forward Montenegro, the Coalition European Montenegro' the DPS campaign stressed the importance of the government's achievements in the EU negotiation process and promised to attract investments and create jobs. The opposition

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<sup>10</sup> Although the coalition changed its member parties for a few times, DPS remained the leading party.

<sup>11</sup> It was a political alliance between 2006-2009, that advocated closer ties between Serbia and Montenegro. In 2009 together with the Socialist People's Party it merged into the New Serb Democracy.

<sup>12</sup> The Bosniak Party abstained from endorsing any candidate.

<sup>13</sup> Some opposition parties criticized the date of the elections and challenged the constitutionality of the legal framework.

<sup>14</sup> Following the EU's opening of accession talks with Montenegro in 2012, the governing coalition stated that a fresh four-year mandate was necessary to proceed with the negotiations. As a result, on 26 July, a motion in favor of early elections was passed with 47 against 27 votes and Parliament was dissolved.

*Democratic Front* (formed in 2012<sup>15</sup>), together with the *Socialist People's Party (SNP)* and *Positive Montenegro (PCG)* obtained 20 seats. A new party founded by environmental activists gained 7 seats and the Bosniak party 3 seats. The opposition emphasized the economic crisis, state corruption and promised reforms in social security and the rule of law.

**In April 2013 Presidential elections** incumbent President *Filip Vujanović* backed by the *Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)* was challenged by *Miodrag Lekić* (political scientist and diplomat, founder of DEMOS) endorsed by the opposition. The race between the two was tight and at the end of the elections, both candidates declared victory. The Electoral Commission released the official results, according to which *Filip Vujanović* received 52.21% and *Miodrag Lekić* - 48.79.

**The October 2016 parliamentary elections** took place in increased political tensions. Due to dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation, protest against the incumbent Prime Minister erupted in the preceding years, calling for his resignation and halting NATO accession talks<sup>16</sup>. This caused a split in the ruling coalition - DPS' coalition partner, the SDP, led by the then Speaker of the Parliament, *Ranko Krivokapić*, voted against the government, ending an 18 year-long alliance. The political landscape also changed significantly as four new political parties<sup>17</sup> emerged.

After months of negotiations among the parliamentary parties, the law implementing the Agreement for Creating Conditions for Free and Fair Elections came into force, which paved the way to holding parliamentary elections on 16 October. On the same day, allied foreign ministers signed the NATO Accession Protocol. The ruling party won with 36 seats, while the *Democratic Front* received 18, the opposition political alliance *Key Coalition* led by *Miodrag Lekić* gained 9 seats, the Democrats - 8. The government was created with the support of the social democratic and minority parties.

The election day was overshadowed by the arrest of former Serbia Gendarmerie commander *Bratislav Dikić*, who was among 20 paramilitaries detained by Montenegrin police on Saturday with an alleged plan of coup d'état. Later it was believed that the plot was organized by the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian opposition aiming to prevent the country's accession to NATO.

**In April 2018 Presidential elections** President of the ruling DPS *Milo Đukanović* (who initially rejected this intention) gained the victory of almost 54%. The opposition achieved a tight majority of the seats. The other two opposition candidates *Mladen Bojanić* (one of the founders and former Secretary - General of the *Centrist Positive Montenegro Party*) and *Draginja Vuksanović* (president of SDP, Lawyer) received 33.4% and 8.2% respectively.

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<sup>15</sup> The DF comprised the New Serbian Democracy Party (NOVA) and the Movement for Changes (PzP) and was led by *Miodrag Lekić*, a former Montenegrin foreign minister.

<sup>16</sup> Allegedly the protests were organized by the democratic front, which attempted to regain the reduced public support after its prominent member *Miodrag Lekić* left the party.

<sup>17</sup> The Social Democrats of Montenegro (SD) emerged after a split from the SDP; Democratic Montenegro (Democrats) split from the SNP; Demos split from the DF, and the civil initiative United Reform Action (URA) split from the PCG.

The August 2020 parliamentary elections have been rightly hailed as the most important

| The name of the party /coalition         | Ideology/political orientation  | Seats |
|--|---|-------|
| The Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) | Pro-European  | 30    |
| For the Future of Montenegro             | Pro-Serbian, pro - Russian  | 27    |
| Peace is our nation                      | Pro-European, centrist, anti-nationalist, reformist, anti-corruption platform | 10    |
| United Reform Action                     | Pro-European, social liberal, green   | 4     |
| Social Democrats (SD)                    | Pro-European, center left   | 3     |
| Bosniak Party                            | Pro-European, Bosniak minority, social conservatism                           | 3     |
| Social Democratic Party (SDP)            | Pro-European, progressive   | 1     |
| The Albanian List                        | Conservative, minority interest   | 1     |
| Albanian Coalition                       | Pre-election coalition of several Albanian parties                            | 1     |

elections in the history of Montenegro. After 30 years of rule the DPS government was changed democratically. Yet, the results came as a surprise to expert communities but also to the citizens, for whom replacing the former ruling party did not seem probable.

The high turnout - 76.69 % reflected, on the one hand, the dissatisfaction of the citizens, but on the other - effective mobilization of the voters by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which staunchly called on support for the opposition. The church turned against the government due to the controversial Freedom and Religion Law, adopted in December 2019 which affected the property of the Church<sup>18</sup>.

11 candidate lists contested elections and the candidate process has been quite transparent. However, the parties used rather similar slogans, that might have confused the voters.

Social media and a Twitter campaign were extensively used by the actors, while young people manifested a high degree of engagement in the campaign as well as in the voting process (Interview data). The OSCE/ODIHR noted that although elections were competitive, they took place in a highly polarized environment over issues of the church and national identity.

The society is sharply divided and polarized and the identity politics that is strongly embraced by *Democratic Front*, remains a major obstacle in overcoming the reconciliation. It remains still unclear whether the ethnic minority parties will join the government. The pro-governmental parties publically agreed on the main principles to be respected. They commit to international agreements signed by the previous government, including NATO

<sup>18</sup> According to the disputed article 62, religious communities need to prove property ownership

before 1918, otherwise the property will belong to the state.

membership, the EU integration path, respect of the rule of law, change of discriminatory laws and not to consider derecognition of Kosovo.

Nevertheless, there is a danger that ongoing protracted negotiations, a mixture of the policy agendas and absence of the hierarchy of the priorities might obscure the EU accession process. The European Commission's new report notes that the new parliament should find a broad cross-party and societal consensus and demonstrate in practice its commitment to Montenegro's EU path (European Commission, 2020). On the other hand, the EU is criticized for its lack of next operational steps in the Western Balkans and most notably, for the absence of measurable indicators to assess the progress in the rule of law sphere (Expert Interview).

On September 23, the leader of the opposition *Peace is Our Nation* was elected speaker of the parliament, while the leader of "For the Future of Montenegro" was proposed for the post of Prime Minister. This confirms that creating an expert government is no longer considered as an option. The formation of an effective government is crucial for the credibility of political leadership, who is expected to root out organized crime and corruption. Another challenge is the high level of politicization of state institutions. Some predict that the new government will most likely dismiss the personnel loyal to the previous one that will create the competence deficit in the state apparatus due to the opposition's relatively limited experience (*Interview with Milena Bešić*). *However, in case a new government shows a strong will to depoliticize the institutions (particularly of the security*

*services), then a good window of opportunity might be opened to bring success in the fragile transition of Montenegro.*

## European People's Party (EPP) Sister Parties

### BS - Bošnjačka stranka

EPP associated member since 2019

*History:* The BS was founded in 2006 by *Rafet Husović*<sup>19</sup>. It was formed by the unification of four Slavic Muslim parties: International Democratic Union, Bosniak Democratic Alternative, Muslim-Bosniak Alliance and Party of National Equality.

*Ideology:* According to the official program, the party is committed to 'the democratization of social and political life, ensuring the functioning of the rule of law, protection of human rights, protection of special minority rights and application of international law in that matter'. The Bosniak Party advocates freedom of entrepreneurship, equality of all forms of ownership and the abolition of unnecessary business procedures. However, at the same time, the party supports the idea of the welfare state and affirms that changes in the economic structure must not jeopardize the social rights of the citizens, nor the positive functions of the welfare state.

The party believes that membership in the EU is a key interest of the citizens of Montenegro and declares that country should become an EU family member as soon as possible. The party sees joining NATO as complementary to EU integration and sees it as a guarantor of international investments and as a precondition for further growth and

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<sup>19</sup> Montenegrin politician of Bosniak ethnicity, who contributed to bringing together various Bosniak parties under one political entity.

development of the domestic economy. The Party supports active institutional cooperation of the party of state with the emigrants and diaspora and believes that the state has a responsibility for the needs of diaspora through an efficient network of diplomatic and consular missions.

*Power structure:* BS has two types of membership: ordinary member and sympathizer, while getting the status of an ordinary membership requires fulfilling of an application, A BS sympathizer could be anyone who expresses support for the BS program (article 19).

The party works with the principle of **‘democratic unity’** which entails three principles: a) respect of freedom of opinion and expression; b) respect for the decisions of the majority and obligation to implement c) the right of the minority to express and retain its opinions. BS is organized at a state and local level. The main organs are:

**Congress:** Held every 3 years, it is the highest body of the party. It adopts the party program, statute and other political acts, assesses the activities of the party between the two Congresses and elects the leaders/representatives of other bodies.

**The Main Board** is the highest body of political leadership and policy implementation between the two Congresses. Its members consist of the President of BS (who performs the function of President of the Main Board), Presidents of the Municipal Boards, deputies in the Parliament of Montenegro, members of the Government, Chairman of the BS Supervisory Board, President of BS Statutory Commission, Presidents of Municipalities, President of the BS Women’s Forum and President of BS Youth Forum (article 29). The main board determines the direction of the party and its general

activities, upon the proposal of the President it elects and dismisses the vice presidents. Adopts the party election program, decides on the entry of the party into coalitions.

**The Presidency** of the party is the executive political body and consists of the President of the BS Vice Presidents, the Head of the BS Parliamentary Group and the Political Director of BS. Its function is more of a supervisory nature but at the same time, it can execute the decisions as well as prepare and propose the decisions to the Main Board. **Executive Board:** performs the tasks of practical implementation and leads the personnel policy of the party, it has a right to initiatives and proposals to the Main Board and the Presidency. The Supervisory Board, which submits a report to the Main Board at least once a year is responsible for supervising the bodies of the party.

**President** represents the party, manages its work, coordinates the work of the other BS bodies. The party has at least two Vice Presidents who perform a certain scope of work at the proposal of the President (article 34).

The Party has two special organizational forms: Women’s Forum and Youth Forum. Article 40 of the statute specifies the organization of the party at the local level. The composition at the local level is replicated from the central one and consists of the following bodies: Electoral local assembly, Local Board, Electoral Assembly at the municipal level, municipal board, President of the municipal board, executive board of the Municipal Board.



### Key Personalities

*Rafet Husović* - President of the party; *Kemal Purišić* - Vice president; *Munib Ličina* - Vice president; *Osman Nurković* - Vice president; *Nedžad Drešević* - Vice president; *Suljo Mustafić* - President of the Executive Board and Political director; *Ervin Ibrahimović* - Member of Parliament; *Amer Smailović* - Member of Parliament; *Kenana Strujić Harbić* - Member of Parliament;

### Sources:

- Own collection of data (interviews<sup>20</sup>, websites and party statutes)
- Reports of International Organisations
- Media sources

### Reference:

*Teona Lavrelashvili*, *Party Passport: Montenegro*, European Party Monitor, Brussels/Leuven, 19 October, 2020, 9 p.

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<sup>20</sup> Expert interviews with *Ms Jovana Marović*, Executive Director of Politikon Network (PIN).

Expert interview with *Ms Milena Bešić*, Director of Center for Democracy and Human Rights – CEDEM.

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