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Interview: Almir Džuvo, former Director of the Intelligence and Security Agency of BiH (OSA), former Head of Bosnia and Herzegovina's mission to NATO, and current lecturer at the American University in BiH, comments on the Montenegrin elections, Russian influences, and the role of the West in the Western Balkans for the Atlantic Initiative.

The New Government Will Not Be Able to Exert a Significant Influence on the Security Apparatus in Montenegro

Interviewers: Edina Bećirević and Sead Turčalo

Atlantic Initiative: Are you concerned about how the elections in Montenegro (MNE) will reflect on regional relations? Do you think that this could affect the region, considering that the future MNE leaders are pro-Russian and pro-Serbian, and that one of their frequent promises to their voters was related to MNE's withdrawal from NATO?

Almir Džuvo: It all depends on their actions. Winning the elections is one thing, but implementing governmental powers is entirely different. It is easy to give promises when you are in opposition. However, any political option for a NATO member state undergoing the EU integration process, a state with established international and regional interests, must follow the defined rules. Once they gain power, the opposition cannot act solely based on their own wishes. The system starts controlling them. No political party that has ever come to power has implemented even 50% of the plans they shared while in opposition. There is an international system that must be respected, and I think that if this opposition forms the government, they will follow a different direction, and not the one they announced during the pre-election campaign. The EU and NATO will ask them to fulfil the obligations assumed by the former government. If they try to act differently, which is an option, they will face sanctions.



ALMIR DŽUVO

Atlantic Initiative: The emerging new government in Montenegro has also announced a restructuring of the country's security apparatus. They are particularly targeting Montenegro's National Security Agency (ANB). What is your experience of cooperation with the ANB?

Almir Džuvo: My experience with the ANB was excellent. When I was the OSA director, our

relationship with the ANB served as an example of excellent cooperation between the agencies of two friendly countries. Let me add here that intelligence agencies in the region have had overall good cooperation. As for the security system - it is a system that has been dominated by one party for 30 years. The question now is how willing will all political entities in MNE be to work together, to put MNE's interests above everything else, to have institutions that will serve the state, not an individual or any political party. If they can find a common language, I think that the police, judiciary, prosecution, and the security system in general will continue operating at the usual pace.

Atlantic Initiative: How do you interpret the restraint of the 'western' international community? On the one hand, it is impossible that they are unaware of the completely opposite values exhibited by the new election winners to those of the Euro-Atlantic allies. It seems as if the international community silently supported the idea of putting an end to three decades of one party's rule - the publicly perceived rule of one man. If this was the only problem, it would of course be understandable, however, the problem is that the parties dominating the anti-Đukanović opposition proudly emphasize their Chetnik ideology. In their view, the elections were won by the Montenegrin metropolitan Amfilohije Radović, known for spreading hatred and intolerance against non-Serbs. Therefore, Montenegro will be ruled by extreme-right parties or, if we speak frankly, parties that can be defined as clerical fascists.

Almir Džuvo: This is the usual behaviour of the international community. They are now waiting to see what will happen. In this situation, they behave like Coca-Cola or McDonald's do with small companies. It's like: we will dump prices as much as we like, because ultimately you will not be able to endure. The international community has mechanisms to stop this government, if it starts opposing their interests. They can simply shut down their sources of money and force the 'new leaders' to leave voluntarily, or make them lose their voters' support in the next elections. The international community certainly knows how to impose or steer developments in a small country like Montenegro. I do not think that the opposition will follow that direction and confront everyone. Just look at what happened with

Vučić in America a few days ago. If somebody told us 15 days ago that Vučić would accept the mutual recognition between Israel and Kosovo, everybody would say that it is impossible. But there is always something that we don't know about the negotiations behind the scenes. We do not know this, because there are some agreements that are not public, there are interests that cannot be presented to everyone. I think that the new government will not do anything to undermine the existing MNE's direction, at least at the beginning. Further developments will depend on global relations, on how Serbia will behave on the regional level, on overall regional relations in the Western Balkans, but also on the development of the internal political situations in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia.

Atlantic Initiative: While we are having this conversation, Serbia announced that they would stop all military exercises in the next six months. The reason behind this decision is the pressure being put on them by the European Union due to the announced military exercise with Belarus, and the preservation of Serbia's military neutrality.

Almir Džuvo: The pressure is certainly being put by the European Union, but also by the USA because of the cooperation with Belarus. But Serbia welcomes this pressure, in a way. Serbia faces grave financial problems, and organizing military exercises is expensive. This is a way for Serbia to buy some time and put itself together. Many international circumstances will be clearer in six months, as will the course that Serbia will choose.

Atlantic Initiative: Interestingly, representatives of western embassies in Montenegro completely ignored the extremist and militant narrative of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) during the religious processions. There wasn't a single condemnation of the hate speech disseminated by Amfilohije. Yet the results of his dehumanizing propaganda could be seen during attacks on minorities, especially on Bosniaks/Muslims in the nights following the elections.

Almir Džuvo: First of all, I think that the international community is quite indifferent towards religion. I think that their general position, as far as I can tell, is that they don't want to go into it.

The second question is whether they recognized the threat, and to what extent. Can the SOC's rhetoric in MNE give rise to a security problem? They care about security problems the most.

Atlantic Initiative: The SOC played a very serious role in the preparation for the wars in the nineties, and it gave its blessing for the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia. It never apologized for allowing those crimes to happen, and it plays the key role in the genocide denial process. The processions organized by the SOC in Montenegro were considered propaganda designed to prepare Serbs for war. How is it possible not to define such a thing as a security problem?

Almir Džuvo: None of those things are disputable. But the question is whether the western international community is able to recognize it. Namely, when it comes to security threats, they always assess how threatened they are. But honestly, I think it is more significant that the representatives of the international community in the field do not have a good understanding of the region. In informal conversations and formal contacts, I was often surprised to see how little they know, and how superficial they are in their work. As for the security assessment in general, they do not prioritize issues they are not concerned about or that do not pose any threat to them, and they are quite indifferent to such matters.

Atlantic Initiative: How much does it depend on local staff being employed in the embassies?

Almir: The influence of local staff is... Well, it happened more than once during meetings that some things were translated with a different meaning maybe, or so as to carry more weight. Also, the local employees in the embassies certainly influence the opinions of their foreign colleagues. That is completely normal.

Atlantic Initiative: Here is a hypothetical question. We have the new government now, formed by the opposition; the government appoints new people both to the security sector and diplomacy, and a pro-Russian person now becomes the head of the MNE's delegation in the North Atlantic Alliance.

Since the country is a NATO member, it has clearance and access to information, and to channel certain positions and initiatives that are carried further. Is there a real problem there?

Almir Džuvo: They can do nothing. Montenegro is too small to exert any influence. There are serious controls, different verification levels. It wouldn't be the first time for someone to 'go down' for cooperating with other countries. NATO has serious protection mechanisms. It is not that simple. Besides, I doubt that the new government will be able to change the structure and impose its own people in the next few years. After 30 years of one party's rule, a very coherent system has been established, and appointing new people to managerial positions will not have a significant effect.

Atlantic Initiative: Could the fact that the pro-Serbian sentiment is now dominant in Montenegro have a positive impact on regional relations? Considering Vučić's visit to Washington and his potential distancing from Russia, could Montenegro's position as a NATO member now help Serbia get closer to NATO? This is an optimistic scenario that could explain, to some extent, the international community's indifference towards the victory of extreme right parties in MNE.

Almir Džuvo: A few months ago, in an interview for Start I said that Serbia had a much better connection with NATO than Bosnia and Herzegovina. People at NATO headquarters in Brussels gave a similar statement a few days ago. What we see in politics is often very different from reality. For example, Đukanović was pro-Russian back in 2009, and 60,000 Russians lived in Montenegro. Politics changed, and he has since completely changed direction, turning towards Euro Atlantic integration. Why Vučić couldn't do the same tomorrow? At the moment, some things seem pretty alarming, but there are mechanisms to gain control over people. Even much bigger countries cannot play solo. What will be MNE's politics? What will be Serbia's politics in a year? Entirely different, maybe. Just look at how things change in the world; now we are friends, then enemies, then friends again. Simply put, interests determine the direction and dynamics of relations at the given moment.

Atlantic Initiative: Actually, based on what you say, governmental mechanisms are very difficult to change and, considering the circumstances, the DPS could come back to power in a short while.

Almir Džuvo: The opposition that will obviously assume power in Montenegro consists of three coalitions, with a minor advantage over the pro-Đukanović political block. Interests in the new coalition can easily confront at some point. This coalition is not very stable and that will not change. I believe that the right choice is to let them establish a government. Talking is one thing, doing is another. Very soon, the world will understand the essential problem with the new government in Montenegro.

Atlantic Initiative: How might Russia take advantage of these elections in Montenegro?

Almir Džuvo: Russia is a constantly present force. It is present everywhere. Of course, Russia looks out for its own interest in everything. The interest that Russia has is to contribute to the destabilization of the West, or to destabilize regions where NATO members have interests. Whenever the areas influenced by the West and the USA get destabilized, it is a success for Russia. Their tactic is to “poke a finger in the eye of the EU and NATO” whenever they can.

Atlantic Initiative: We are trying to have you outline a „worst case scenario“ which might materialize when the extreme right and pro-Russian forces assume power in Montenegro, but we are somehow failing. It seems that your estimates are fairly optimistic.

Almir Džuvo: It is not optimism. I simply think that Montenegro will keep its Euro Atlantic direction, if that is what the western forces want. This is why I don't see a particular threat in the government change in Montenegro. Besides, I think that internal affairs in Montenegro will be clearer in six months as well. My estimate is that they will find common interests and reach a compromise. I do not think that existing tensions will escalate to some kind of an internal conflict. There will be incidents as long as there is interest in them, there is no question about that. ■

Muslims in Montenegro after the Elections, and Fear of the Future

Written by: The Atlantic Initiative Team

The announcement of this year's parliamentary election results on 30 August 2020 in Montenegro was followed by mass street celebrations by pro-Serbian nationalist coalitions throughout the country. Serious incidents, threats and attacks on Muslims were registered in Pljevlja, and there were verbal incidents in other cities, with a spike in hate speech on social networks.

According to the most recent census from 2011, Muslim ethnic minorities (Bosniaks, mostly Albanians, Muslims, and partly Roma) account for around 20% of Montenegro's 620,029 inhabitants. They were key partners for ethnic Montenegrins who voted for Montenegro's independence in the 2006 referendum, which resulted in its eventual separation from Serbia. For two decades, Serbian political and religious circles have viewed the policy of Montenegrin independence and identity as a national betrayal. After gaining independence, Montenegro joined NATO, recognized Kosovo's independence, and changed its policies towards Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, state independence did not lead to the independence of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro, which had been autocephalous until 1918. The Serbian Orthodox Church never agreed to register in Montenegro as a religious community, and in the last elections it confirmed that it survived as a key piece of infrastructure in the Greater Serbia project.

Significant results of pro-Serbian parties in these elections are being viewed as the triumph of political orthodoxy. Around 1500 priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church have been engaged in active agitation in the past two decades in Montenegro. The Law on the Freedom of Religion was merely an excuse for the conflict between the two Orthodox

denominations to surface. On the one hand, there were those who believed that there should be an autocephalous church for all Orthodox people in Montenegro and that it should replace the current Serbian Orthodox Church, which is militant and anti-Montenegrin. On the other hand, there are those who have never reconciled with the Montenegrin state and national identity as separate from the Serbian one.

The advantage gained by pro-Serbian parties in these elections is seen as indication of the potential departure by Montenegro from its Euro-Atlantic path, as had been advocated by the Serbian parties during their pre-election campaign. Also, the strong influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the political life in Montenegro is a reflection of the country's return to direct Serbian influences, i.e. under the umbrella of the Greater Serbian ideology. The destabilization of relations between ethnic groups, which started early in the pre-election campaign and was practically led by the Serbian Orthodox Church, intensified and escalated during the post-election "festivities".

The adoption of the Law on the Freedom of Religion was an attempt to regulate relations between religious communities and the state, but it was viewed by pro-Serbian circles as a direct attack on the Serbian Orthodox Church and its property. The processions followed - protests organized by the Church, which served to directly agitate against the then-ruling majority. The leading role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in uniting the pro-Serbian political block became most evident after the initial results were announced. The pro-Serbian politicians, led by the leader of the "Coalition for the Future of Montenegro" Zdravko Krivokapić, immediately went to the Church to literally kiss the hand of Amfilohije Radović, Metropolitan of the Montenegro and the Littoral SOC.



The celebrations that followed the announcement of the election results (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 31 August, and 1 and 2 September), included a series of incidents and attacks on Muslims throughout Montenegro. The most severe took place in Pljevlja where, as announced in the pre-election campaign, the pro-Serbian coalition leader Zdravko Krivokapić claimed “change will begin.”

Bosniaks and Albanians make up the majority in Rožaje, Plav, Gusinje and Petnjica in the north of Montenegro, and Ulcinj and Tuzi in the south. In these areas, those celebrating the win of the Serbian parties were provocative, waving Serbia’s tricolours from their cars, playing Chetnik songs, and showing off iconography that sends messages of hatred to minorities. In Pljevlja, a town on the border with Serbia about 4,000 Muslims still live with memories of the terror they endured in the early 1990’s.

Of the 4 000 Bosniaks in Pljevlja, only a few had been employed in public companies before Đukanović’s DPS came into power, and they could not hope for a managerial position.

In interviews, Bosniaks from Pljevlja told us about the terrifying atmosphere after the announcement of the election results. In addition to aggressive parading around the city, the most severe incident on election night occurred when those who were celebrating surrounded the private home of the local

Bosniak politician and dignitary Mustafa Brahić with around 150 cars. They carried Serbian flags and lit torches. Mustafa Brahić is politically engaged in the DPS; he is the director of the Public Water Supply Company and vice-president of the Majlis of the Islamic Community in Pljevlja. According to Brahić, threats and calls for him “to move to Turkey”, accompanied by loud Chetnik music, continued until the early hours of the morning. This incident and the overall atmosphere in the city was cause for great fear among Bosniaks and other Muslims in Pljevlja. Other Bosniaks were also exposed to similar insults and threats.

This activity continued. On the night of 1 September, the glass door of the Islamic Community Board, next to Husein-paša’s Mosque, was broken and the message was thrown through a window reading “Pljevlja will be Srebrenica.”

During the 1990s and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, six Bosniaks were killed in the village of Bukovica, to the west of Pljevlja, and a dozen Muslim bars and shops were burned down. Another 300 Bosniaks were expelled from the rural area of Bukovica. Those inhabitants fled and moved to Pljevlja and other cities in Montenegro populated by Muslims. These new celebrations have reminded the Muslims in this area of the horrible persecutions from the 1990s.

According to testimonies of the main imam in Pljevlja, and the Islamic Community leaders in MNE, many have begun discussing emigrating from Montenegro and seeking political asylum. A father and son who were physically attacked in a bar in Pljevlja the day after the elections sought help from the Grand Mufti of the Islamic Community in Montenegro to obtain political asylum in a western country. Talking to Muslims in Pljevlja, we have learned that many incidents were not reported to the police due to fear of retaliation. They agreed to talk to the author of this text only behind closed doors, with the promise that their identity would be protected.

Albanians in Montenegro are in a similar position. Many Albanians who were expelled from Kosovo in the 1990s found refuge in the majority-Muslim areas in Montenegro, such as Bar, Ulcinj and Rožaje. Albanians and Bosniaks supported the previous government in Montenegro because it had changed its policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Through the different political policies of pro-Montenegrin parties, Muslims also managed to achieve a significant level of integration into Montenegrin society. This began in 1997 when Đukanović won the presidential election, and was further strengthened after Montenegro gained independence and turned towards Euro Atlantic integration. Bosniaks, as well as other Muslims, received greater religious rights and economic stability as well as equal employment opportunities in the public sector, and better access to education.

Generally, the animosity of pro-Serbian policies towards Bosniaks and Albanians can be contextualized within the framework of the ideology of radical Greater Serbian nationalism. Bosniaks and Albanians are seen as the key political force that had contributed to Montenegro's secession from Serbia. During an interview with our interlocutors, there was no question that the victory of pro-Serbian political parties in Montenegro would contribute to further ethnic divides amongst the Montenegrin Orthodox community. It is expected that the SOC will be able to work more intensely to win over indecisive Montenegrins, and religious re-conversion to the Serbian Orthodoxy will become increasingly imminent, given that the Montenegrin Orthodox Church is understaffed, has an undeveloped status

(noncanonical), and relies on the native Montenegrin identity. Also, it is expected that pro-Serbian forces will find partners in minority communities among Muslims and political parties inclined towards pro-Serbian coalitions, such as the religiously conservative SPP from Novi Pazar. Announcements have already been made that the leader of the SPP's Novi Pazar branch will be one of the ministers in the future Montenegrin government.

The Islamic Community in Montenegro has an additional fear that their compact community will be internally destabilized by the Islamic Community from Serbian part of Sandžak, Novi Pazar, that is perceived as radical and conservative. More specifically, the Islamic Community in Montenegro is composed of both Bosniaks and Albanians (its activities are mostly bilingual, and the staff structure is balanced). Apart from bilingual lectures and religious teachings in Bosnian and Albanian, they foster an almost identical tradition of moderate Islam. The Islamic Community of Montenegro is autonomous, but it fosters an extremely good cooperation with Sarajevo. Catechism textbooks, the syllabus of the Madrasa in Podgorica, and their religious literature in general mostly come from Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, although physically close, cooperation with the Islamic Community in Serbia (Novi Pazar) is not good.

Our interlocutors fear that, in addition to religion, language and culture might also undergo changes which could additionally threaten the future orientation of Montenegro (e.g. adopting Serbian as the official language). Both Bosniaks and Albanians expressed similar concerns related to cultural, religious and educational marginalization, and the deprivation of, and decrease in, their gained political and religious freedoms. ■

Serbia's View on the Montenegrin Election Results

Written by Izabela Kisić

The Serbian government seems bolstered by the possibility of the appointment of a sympathetic, Serbian Orthodox Church backed, government in Montenegro, and will likely begin increasing their direct involvement in MNE affairs. The support to this block is conspicuous in public and in the media, without offering any insight into potential implications for the region, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and the Euro Atlantic integration processes. Belgrade was involved in the Montenegrin elections, both logistically and financially. Two pro-Serbian parties have always had a single goal – to bring Montenegro back under Serbia's aegis, stop the European integration process, and turn Montenegro towards Russia.

Belgrade's intentions should primarily be interpreted in light of the fact that they never closed the Serbian issue, and that has been confirmed by the official documents specifying its policies towards the region. This issue is covered by the *Strategy of preserving and strengthening relations between the mother country and Diaspora and between the mother country and Serbs of the region* (2011) and the *Charter on Serbian Cultural Space* (2019).

Both documents define the Serbian Orthodox Church as the main institution for the implementation of these strategies, because it is the only legitimate cross-border institution. This role has been confirmed in Montenegro.

The "cultural space" that Serbia should, as the "mother country", provide for includes the "geographical and historical space marked by the active presence of Serbian culture and cultural heritage. In this way, they emphasize, all holders of Serbian

cultural identity will be included and connected, regardless if they live in the Republic of Serbia, areas that have been populated by Serbs through history, or in displacement."

Belgrade never truly accepted Montenegro's departure and treats it as an "internal issue", attributing an "immeasurable geopolitical importance" to it. Serbian political elites have always treated as another Serbian country with the same people. The Montenegrin nation and identity are contested, and these elections have created an opportunity to instate a country leader who will respect Serbian geopolitical interests.

Although the opposition parties have announced that their foreign policy direction will not change, there is a suspicion that they have only done so in order to curb the distrust of neighbours and the European Union regarding their intentions.

During the pre-election campaign, the pro-Serbian opposition announced that it would dismantle Đukanović's regime, but also insist on other issues such as NATO membership and the recognition of Kosovo.

Montenegrin identity will be targeted to help achieve Serbia's geopolitical goals in the region. Such intentions of the "Coalition for the Future of Montenegro" are already visible, primarily in issues concerning education, language and Cyrillic script. They also announced the revocation of the citizenship law which would enable a number of Serbia's citizens to participate in the 2021 census, potentially changing Montenegro's demographic structure - increasing the percentage of Serbs, and bringing the population of Montenegrins down to around 25%.

Belgrade actively incited the division of Montenegrin society by emphasizing the disadvantaged position of Serbs, which has been testified by numerous reports underlining that Serbian identity is under attack. This issue dominates all official statements. Although the Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić avoids statements that would directly imply an interference with internal affairs of neighbouring countries, on the election day in Montenegro, he said that regardless of the election result it was important that the “Serbian people stood up and started protecting its identity rights”, and that it was important not to have a decrease in the number of Serbs in the upcoming Montenegrin population census. Therefore, one may expect that all Belgrade’s efforts in the forthcoming months will be focused on a population census campaign in order to demonstrate that Serbs constitute the majority in Montenegro, and thereby further delegitimize Montenegrin statehood.

Unlike Vučić, the Serbian Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin is willing to openly express Serbian interests in the region. Commenting on the Montenegrin elections, he said that “Milo Đukanović’s government (...) did not understand that it launched the process of Serbian unification which cannot be stopped.”

The true winner in the election is the Serbian Orthodox Church, which played a key role in the opposition’s victory. Throughout the centuries, the SOC has been the backbone of the Serbian people and a symbol of Serbian identity. This is where its strong influence comes from, and it demonstrated its power to mobilize citizens in these elections. Although corruption and rule of law were the main themes of the Montenegrin opposition’s pre-election campaign, the Church’s role indicates that their goal was a change in regional relations. The SOC has always contested the borders of Yugoslav republics and maintained good connections with wartime leaders of insurgent Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia. Considering the biography of the “For the Future of Montenegro” coalition leader Zdravko Krivokapić, there is no doubt that the SOC contributed to his instatement as the election list leader. Krivokapić is a professor of mechanical engineering and one of the founders of the non-governmental organization “*Ne damo Crnu Goru*” (“We will not give away Montenegro”), which is believed to be close to the

Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral (It was founded after the adoption of the Law on the Freedom of Religion and the Legal Status of Religious Communities).

Given the clear aspirations of the SOC to influence political life in the region, it will remain a significant political actor in Montenegro. The revocation of the Law on the Freedom of Religion and the Legal Status of Religious Communities which was the cause for the processions will probably be the SOC’s first request for the new government.

In recent years, the government of Serbia awarded around 3.5 million euro to Serbian organizations, the highest amount ever allocated for organisations outside Serbia, which was confirmed by president Vučić. The assistance was addressed to organizations such as the writers’ association, Matica Srpska, and a portion was used for the construction of *Srpska kuća* (Serbian House).¹ The Serbian Government said that the money was intended for associations “dealing with the improvement of economic, cultural and political cooperation of Montenegro with Serbia and the Republika Srpska”.²

The election result in Montenegro is another impetus for pro-Russian and nationalist opposition in Belgrade. Mladen Đorđević, president of the movement *Oslobođenje* (“Liberation”), “asks Belgrade to reinstate the Council for Serbs in the region, which would support Serbian people and its institutions with representatives of line ministries and the Serbian Orthodox Church.” He reminds everyone that the constitutional and legal framework, declarations and strategies of the Serbian Assembly dealing with this issue provide sufficient opportunities for active approach and cooperation. He notes that a large part of the Serbian public followed the elections in Montenegro because “it is a unique political and cultural space populated by Serbs.”

One of the most eager advocates of the division of Kosovo, Director of the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies, Jelena Milić, expects that the new government will be more responsive to Serbia’s needs, and will have a somewhat more flexible approach regarding relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Analysts and media from Belgrade ignore Đukanović's achievements – the renewed independence of Montenegro, NATO membership, and EU approximation. Essentially, it is not Đukanović's decades-long rule that bothers them, but his attitude towards the region and foreign policy.

Such election results have certainly encouraged Belgrade's expectations that the unification of Serbian territories is, in fact, possible.

Since the pro-Serbian parties did not win the number of votes necessary to appoint a government, great expectations have been placed on Dritan Abazović, leader of the Unified Reform Action (URA) and the civic coalition "*Crno na bijelo*", and whom the future Montenegrin government depends on. Although ideologically on the opposite pole, the Serbian elite openly supports Abazović. Among other things, Abazović is convincing regarding the preservation of the current foreign policy which was also followed by Đukanović's DPS, and he supports NATO, the recognition of Kosovo, and EU integration.

It is not by chance that one of the most influential ideologists of Serbian nationalism who is particularly active on the Montenegrin issue, Matija Bećković, said that the Serbian youth would carry Abazović in their arms if he came to Belgrade. Similarly, Milošević's foreign minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Vladislav Jovanović, referred to Abazović as the "sprout of the future." The support for Abazović, whose party is certainly in no position to impose its views regarding Montenegro's future direction on the coalition, exclusively serves the appointment of a government majority-led by the pro-Serbian coalition.

A government which includes the Democratic Front would certainly be closer to Belgrade and the Kremlin. Chauvinism against Bosniaks in the North is on the rise. Glass on the premises of the Islamic Community in Pljevlja was broken, with the message: "The blackbird has flown, Pljevlja will be Srebrenica." Such incidents are used to accuse Đukanović's regime of allegedly provoking conflict in order to "create chaos and stay in power." The Bosniak community in Serbia is extremely upset by these incidents and related messages, encouraged by the Belgrade media.

Western countries have taken action by putting pressure on the appointment of an expert government which would not include the Democratic Front (DF). This would enable a peaceful transition in Montenegro, which would in turn bring the country further on its European integration path.

Instead of taking a clear position regarding EU membership, Serbia keeps plummeting into nationalism and populism, which prevents pluralisation and the democratisation of Serbian society. This will pose a long-term burden on relations between Belgrade and Podgorica.

As the main driver of change in the Balkans, the European Union will have to pay more attention to the causes behind the failure to overcome the war legacy in the Western Balkans. This means that Serbia will have to accept the reality in the region. Consequences of war and Serbia's territorial and ethnic aspirations keep preventing the normalization of relations between post-Yugoslav countries. Misconceived identity issues and the shrinking of national identities to ethnic identities in all Balkan countries will keep deepening the crisis in each of those countries, and in their mutual relations. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30811809.html>
- 2 Insajder, 21 May 2020

Darko Šuković is editor-in-chief of the first independent radio station in Montenegro, Radio Antena M, and host of "The Absolute Truth", most viewed TV political talk show in Montenegro.¹

New Montenegro: Unstable Version of Republika Srpska

Written by Darko Šuković

The final results of the parliamentary elections in Montenegro have yet to be officially declared, but the prospect of a victory for the opposition demands analysis.

On Sunday, leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church – who, with the backing of Moscow and Belgrade and the aid of obscure propaganda machinery, have been laying the groundwork for years – finally delivered a coup de grace to the ruling coalition. Mistakes made by this alliance in prior elections were not repeated, and the result speaks for itself.

Given what they were up against, it would be cruel and pointless to muse on the shortcomings of the defeated. However, it is certainly appropriate to speculate on the consequences of the election, given that many do not seem ready to accept the outcome or look ahead. Indeed, Montenegro as a sovereign state, de facto no longer exists. The name will remain and even the country's NATO membership status (although yesterday, the Russians indicated that they expect Podgorica to return to nineteenth-century foreign policy alignments); but in reality, Montenegro will now be much like a more unstable version of Republika Srpska, under the sway of the Church.

It is pointless to lament the inexplicable political shortsightedness of Western governments that have shown more suspicion of the Đukanović government's connections with organized crime and corruption than they have of the pro-Russian alternative, with its clerico-fascist platform and Ratko Mladić sympathizers. And anyone who



finds this description of the cultural and programmatic aims of the "For the future of Montenegro" coalition (for which a more honest name would be "For the future without Montenegro") too harsh or unfair needs only to look at the Chetnik orgy that followed Krivokapić's announcement that "the regime has fallen." In particular, they can bring their attention to violence committed against Muslims in northern Montenegro, the provocative waving of the "tricolor" flag in Tuzi, and other similar manifestations in the face of which local foreign embassies, monitors from Brussels, the NGO sector, and "independent" media have been silent...

We are used to this from the Russians; but from the Americans, Germans, British, and other democratic Western powers? No!

The fact that the Democratic Front (DF) and its governing partners do not have a majority does not mean that the stage isn't set to achieve the coalition's key goal – the suppression and erasure of the Montenegrin identity and the framing of Montenegro as a Serbian state. To put it simply, on Sunday, they laid the foundations to realize a first phase toward this end, and in doing so, embraced the proposal of fascist and Belgrade vassal Aleksandar Raković, from Grbalj, to reduce the proportion of "Montenegrins" to 25% in next year's census.

¹ This article has been originally published in Montenegrin language on this [link](#).



Who will stand in the way of their realization of this plan? Dritan Abazović and his United Reform Action (URA) party? Does he have the integrity and capacity? Instead of asking the lazy question – “Is Dritan a Chetnik?” – it would be more useful to look at URA influence over the DF in practice, and the results. For example, four years ago, the local authority in Budva had only one URA voice; and on Sunday, while they kept that seat, the DF doubled their power. As Ljubo Filipović rightly asked: Why do you think that the same will not happen at the state level?

A stagnating URA may not become an agent of the aggressive party of Serbian ultranationalists yet again; but a party with just 5% support also cannot control one six times stronger. Moreover, it can be no surprise to Caro Paviličić and other URA members to see the anti-Montenegrin hysteria stirred up by the DF. The political aims of the DF are in fact quite transparent. Meaning, if Abazović swore he had no clue what Daka Davidović does for DF or that he had not seen Zdravko Krivokapić kiss the hand of every priest he ever encountered, even URA leader Božena Jelušić would not believe it.

Needless to say, the URA's flirtation with the Serbian Church and the "For the Future of Montenegro" coalition was public and shamefully unprincipled, particularly regarding the qualification of crimes in Srebrenica. However, the answer to whether Dritan is a Chetnik is: No, but it doesn't matter! Because, all the main goals of the Church and the DF can be achieved while the URA watches; like a political UNPROFOR.

Indeed, the oath taken by Krivokapić to Montenegro while everyone around him screamed about Serbia was a mockery. The singing of the Montenegrin anthem during the URA's celebration with its post-election partner was equally cynical, as the last line calling for an “eternal” Montenegro inherently contradicts the entire purpose of the DF. The question of the Montenegrin nation and state is not just concerning, it is now catastrophically problematized; and this will not change quickly or easily. Still, when celebrations of “Great Serbia” have toned down a bit, it would be wise to understand that, on Sunday night, Montenegrins did not disappear from this country. And, they haven't lost their pride or their heart. Perhaps some sovereigntists in the URA noticed this and felt a deserved dose of shame.

It is unfortunate but true that, so far, the Montenegrin state has rarely been a loving mother to those most loyal to it, more often acting as an evil step-mother. And on Sunday, she showed a painful affection for those who betrayed her. The lesson of this will be useful at some time in the future, but now, on the basis of what I've seen in the streets, it is my conclusion that Montenegrins have two paths ahead: to emigrate from their country, or to unite in a coalition that commits to a fight against clerico-fascists and their efforts to return society to the Middle Ages.

Frankly, there is only one right choice in the fight for our country and our identity. ■

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