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A 'Balkan Autumn?' Party Politics and Civic Manifestations in Bosnia and Montenegro before and during the 2012 Elections

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With the beginning of the autumn political season in the Balkans, two countries faced elections which would hardly turn out to be revolutionary but the build-up to which marked the emergence of true, civic opposition to the elites' controversial performance over the last years. Bosnia held local polls on 7 October amidst renewed political turmoil in its Bosniak-Croat Federation and at central state level, and Montenegro went through an early general vote on 14 October in the context of persisting economic and corruption-related troubles, despite the good news of starting European Union accession talks in June. In both countries, however, civic initiatives gained form and focus during the summer to oppose recurrent arbitrary behaviour of and blatant corruption signals emanating from the political elites. All this happens in times when the European Union, the organisation for which Bosnia and Montenegro strive, continues to be fixed on its existential eurozone-related problems and has banished the Western Balkans agenda to the rear. But the EU was also the proud and deserving

recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. It was partly because of its benign, powerful and irreversible effect on the Balkan peninsula's peace and development that the bloc received this highly respected accolade. Europe must live up to its merits now and support the spontaneous, grassroots civic movements in the still inexperienced, fledgling democracies of the Balkans. The indecent elites are still there - interested in self-enrichment, manipulating the publics with nationalist rhetoric and blatantly abusing its trust and resources. The carriers of democracy and prosperity are already bulging in these societies – all they need is a little encouragement.

Bosnia: a shift amidst renewed institutional impasse

After overcoming a 16-month political crisis of no central state government and agreeing to form one in February 2012, Bosnian politicians turned the ensuing scorching Balkan summer into a political hell for the country and its institutions, again. Inter-party squabbles in the Bosniak-Croat Federation deprived this entity of its ruling coalition which was automatically reflected on the central state government, dragging Bosnia into another delay of vital EU-required reforms. It also was a godsend for the Republika Srpska President, Milorad Dodik, who was happy to blame politicians in the Federation for Bosnia's current EU troubles but who has been the main obstructionist along that path ever since he ascended to power in 2006. The European Commission's annual progress report on Bosnia, released in October, was unsurprisingly scathing, using for the first time unforgiving words such as 'disappointing' amidst the usual EU jargon (indeed, of the regular clichés 'limited progress' was this time much more commonly employed). But nevertheless the local elections in Bosnia and the run-up to them signalled a palpable change at least at two levels: first, there was a shift in the political support for the incumbents, especially in Republika Srpska, demonstrating voters' fatigue with their inaction, blatant corrupt practices and forfeiture of whatever a national interest in Bosnia may be for the sake of constant petty rows; and second, the people of Banja Luka, Bosnia's second largest city and the *de facto* capital of Republika Srpska, laid the foundation of a possible genuine civil society in the country (in the sense of active citizenry, irrespective of ethnic bondage and interests) by spontaneously organising into a civic movement aiming to stop construction in a central city park. This movement gradually grew to become a protest action against corruption and politicians' wrong conduct in general.

'The summer of our discontent'

In February, in the middle of the greatest snow Sarajevo had seen since the Olympics in 1984, things had finally to turn on the brighter side for Bosnia, its institutions and citizens: the six main ethnic parties agreed to form a parliamentary majority and a Council of Ministers at the central state level. Bosnia is composed of two semi-autonomous regions, the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the

predominantly Serb Republika Srpska. It has, however, an overarching central government which is responsible for foreign policy, defence, indirect taxation and, most importantly, coordination and implementation of reforms required by the EU on Bosnia's path toward membership of the bloc. With the newly instituted state bodies, Bosnia had to make up for 16 months of vacuum, reach certain agreements and adopt important legislature. The key tasks, elaborated in a roadmap prepared by the European Commission, included agreement on a coordinated mechanism by all in Bosnia to deal with EU matters (a one-voice approach that has been missing), a constitutional amendment removing existing discrimination against smaller ethnic groups willing to run for state posts (the so-called Sejdic-Finci amendment), adoption of laws on holding a census, state aid and military property distribution, among others.¹ The central state institutions had some success in addressing two of those priorities: a law on the census was adopted, and there was an agreement on state aid distribution among entities and cantons. But the most important task – the Sejdic-Finci amendment of the constitution that would allow people other than Bosniaks, Serbs or Croats to run for the state presidency and that was a condition set by the Council of Europe back in 2009 – remained unfinished. One reason was that the main parties – representative of the respective Bosniak, Croat and Serb national interests – submitted proposals for constitutional change that were very ethnocentric and unacceptable to their counterparts. Ethnocentrism has been the basic characteristic of Bosnian politics ever since the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 that put an end to the deadly three-year war. But an additional blow which surpassed this concrete case and blocked all state institutions, again, was an initially petty-looking quarrel between the main Bosniak-dominated political parties (partners in government in the Federation) – the Social Democratic party (SDP) and the Party for Democratic Action (SDA). The two, who together with Serb and Croat parties also formed the ruling coalition at central state level, disagreed on the parameters of the state-level budget, which Bosnia was already late in adopting. SDA withdrew its support, leading to a meltdown of the governing coalition both at state level and in the Federation. SDP, led by current foreign minister Zlatko Lagumdžija, then aligned with the populist formation of Bosnia's most popular tycoon, Fahrudin Radončić – the Party for Better Future (SBB). It has also been trying to win the previously shunned mainstream Croat parties – the Croatian Democratic Union BiH (HDZ BiH) and its offshoot HDZ 1990. Right now, no agreement is yet clear on a new state-level coalition and none is indeed visible at the Federation level. Things were complicated by an attack mounted in the hot summer months by Republika Srpska parties – Milorad Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) – on SDP's Lagumdžija, the foreign minister, for supporting a West-initiated United Nations resolution on Syria without consulting the Serbs, who usually align with Russia's interests. And the entire renewed political standoff was of course exacerbated by the campaign for the 7 October local elections – campaigns being a period in Bosnia when nationalist rhetoric sharpens and no

¹ European Commission. "Joint Conclusions from the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process with Bosnia and Hercegovina and the Road Map for BiH's EU membership application". Press release, 27 June 2012. Available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-503_en.htm.

agreement whatsoever on shared priorities is realistic.

A European slashing

At this backdrop, the unprecedented sharpness of the European Commission's 2012 regular annual progress report on Bosnia that came out in October was not news. While the reports on Croatia and Albania were positive and encouraging, those on Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia cautious yet fair and stimulating, the one on Bosnia was mostly depreciative, grudging and using language incongruous with EU diplomatic talk so far (the number of times the combination 'no/limited/little progress' was used was disproportionately greater to the times '(some) progress' was used, with even astringent words such as 'disappointing' used in the press release).² The most important criticism was fundamental in nature – Bosnia lacked a unified voice in its dealing with the EU, meaning EU membership was not a shared and undisputed priority of all political factors in the country. Sluggishness and lack of progress in the fulfilment of political and economic criteria for membership and synchronisation of the legislation were also underlined. The concrete setback cited was the failure to implement the EC's road map and its most important task – the Sejdic-Finci constitutional amendment. Indeed, some local political analysts in Bosnia understandably concluded after the EC report came out that "Bosnian politicians did little more than distract the public from the core problems with prolonged arguments over the formation of a new government. The parties in Bosnia are not in general dedicated to the EU integration process and they do not have an interest in progress in that way...The reason is that progress in EU integration means the rule of law and increased transparency and responsibility."³

An anatomy of Bosnia's propensity for crisis

What has caused the intensifying EU criticism of Bosnia? What lies beneath the recurring political crises in the country? Probably the most relevant explanation is one that follows from the above quotation: Bosnian politicians have no stake in progress, as they benefit enormously from the status quo. They use nationalist rhetoric to hold their constituencies hostage to their self-enrichment interests. Ethnic politics is possible in Bosnia, and the Balkans as a whole, because the peoples of this region have not so long ago gone through numerous conflicts and have lost friends and relatives. It is much easier to manipulate voters on ethnic grounds in such a situation. The expression of this ethnically-justified theft of public resources is most conspicuous in Bosnia. Bosnian

² See European Commission. *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012 Progress Report*. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/ba_rapport_2012_en.pdf; European Commission. "Key findings of the 2012 Progress Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina". Press release, 10 October 2012. Available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-764_en.htm.

³ See Jukic, Elvira M. "Bosnian Elite Fears EU Rule of Law, Experts Say". *BalkanInsight*, 12 October 2012. Available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnia-fears-rule-of-law-through-eu-integration>.

politicians of all three ethnic hues have feudalised the country into ethnic-partisan fiefdoms and make sure to not encroach upon any neighbouring fiefdom too much. Political competition is not one of ideas and party platforms but among powerful factors among and within the ethnic fiefdoms. Any attempt to infringe upon a neighbouring 'feudal' dominion or oust an incumbent at the top of one ends up in political crisis.

The most common of these crises has until recently been the one along the Republika Srpska – Federation of BiH line. The Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) are the majority in Bosnia. They have supported the idea of a unified country modelled after civic nations in Europe's West – they said the rights of all Serbs and Croats would be guaranteed in such a community. But Serbs are suspicious that this will not be the case and insist on the autonomy of the RS as a guarantor of their rights. And Croats are afraid they would be completely squeezed out in a unitary state. All this sounds pretty reasonable when explained in modern state-building and democracy talk. And all those concerns and fears *could* be addressed by the EU, and the local politicians *would* embrace true reconciliation if it were simply that. But the truth is that interactions among the main ethnic elites in Bosnia are not defined within the state-building/democracy paradigm; they are defined within the feudal pattern of theft and control over the resources of ethnically-sensitive serfs. The Bosniak elite's interests are not in a genuine civic nation; neither are they in discriminating against Serbs per se: they consist in the amassing of more goods from the neighbouring ethnic Serb fiefdom. The Serb elite's interests are not in protection of the human rights of ordinary Bosnian Serbs: they are in protecting a stable taxing base, free of the Muslim elite's encroachments. That is how the political conflicts between RS and the FBiH are born. They are intensified when 'hungrier' elites come to power in the Bosniak or Serb feudal estates, respectively: then the struggle to steal from the constituencies gets crueller.

In the period following the 2010 general elections, a similar internal struggle in the Federation (the Bosniak-dominated fiefdom) took place, precipitated by the rising influence of Lagumdžija's SDP. SDP, which won most votes, began removing officials in public companies that were loyal (and appointed by) the previously strong SDA. (State-owned companies in Bosnia such as the telecoms, power utilities and construction giants from the recent Yugoslav past are a most lucrative source of cash.) Although SDP and SDA formed a coalition initially, they soon fell out, quite logically. The nadir of the relationship was the failure to agree on the state budget in the summer of 2012 and SDA's withdrawal from the ruling coalition. What happened is that SDA woke up to its rising clout and was unwilling to tolerate SDP's milking of the rewarding Bosniak-controlled state firms any more. SDA's gaining strength was demonstrated by its performance in the October 2012 local elections. This time on a lower, Federation (intra-fiefdom) level, quarrel over access to public resources resulted in a political crisis.

In this context, the failure to fulfil EU requirements and reform an inefficient system seems rational if viewed from Bosnian politicians' perspective: their strategies are

dictated by the interests of self-enrichment, which are the same across the spectrum but have only taken different ethnic colouring on the outside. They try not to obstruct each other in stealing from their reserved constituencies, but sometimes crises erupt when a given political party gains strength and gets too greedy. Yet their intrinsic, shared interest is not to shake the system too much and keep the status quo, manipulating it with nationalist rhetoric and preying on the suffering of peoples formerly at war. There are two ways to confront such a vicious circle. **One** is an increased and consistent pressure from the EU, not only in the form of biting annual reports from the Commission, but also by frequent personal visits by high-ranking EU politicians to Sarajevo and Banja Luka and constant and exhaustive goading. The EU's noble influence on its periphery is an established fact and should only become more focused. Enlargement, and all its leverage power, is a proven way to encourage democratic trends and reaffirm values. But the **really effective** way to break the 'ethno-feudal' pattern of present-day Bosnia is to support the Bosnian people themselves in waking up to the vile reality they have been subjected to, renouncing the delusion of nationalism and overturning their corrupt landlords via popular action. And this is where the local elections of October 2012 and the run-up to them bring in a positive note.

The local elections and their implications

The local election in Bosnia held in October 2012 proved that (1) citizens had had enough of current officials in power, that is, they exercised a protest vote; and (2) slowly a true civil society is showing signs of forming in Bosnia based not on ethnicity but on values, embodied by the spontaneous but later organised park protests in the bastion of Republika Srpska's master feudal, Milorad Dodik, - Banja Luka. This latter disaffection trend has had various manifestations throughout the country – from intentional casting of invalid ballots to direct hints at readiness to sell one's vote.

According to the preliminary results released by Bosnia's Central Election Commission, the mayoral contest has shown that SDA is the winner of the local polls on a national level with 34 posts, 3 fewer than in 2008. Similarly SDS (alone or in coalitions) was the undisputed winner in RS (27 mayors, up from 13 in 2008), and on the Croatian side the return of the HDZ 'denomination' was remarkable (14 mayoral posts, compared to 3 in 2008). Dodik's SNSD suffered a major defeat, obtaining 15 mayors – down from 41 four years ago – and SDP got 11 (9 in 2008).⁴ What do the results actually mean? First, it is evident that the political parties currently in power were given a clear no-confidence vote. SDP acceded its leading position in the FBiH, acquired at the general elections in 2010, to the centre-right and somewhat more nationalist SDA (the party founded by the war-time Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović, whose son Bakir is currently in the Bosnian presidency). SDP had been at the beginning of its mandate the big hopeful for civic-minded, young and educated Bosnians and Western policy-makers and observers:

⁴ See "Izbori u BiH: Ko su novi načelnici [Elections in BiH: Who are the new mayors]". *Al Jazeera Balkans*, 8 October 2012. Available at http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/izbori-u-bih-ko-su-novi-nacelnici?utm_source=ajbsf.

it declares itself as multi-ethnic party, and is more left-leaning, if that could be claimed for a party in Bosnia, than most of its counterparts. But SDP is actually Bosniak-dominated, and its constituency is predominantly Bosniak. What is more important, its policies while in power were clearly defending the Bosniak ethnic interest in Bosnia and were even nationalist (exemplified by their proposal for handling the Sejdic-Finci problem – a proposal suggesting even further segregation of the three main ethnic groups and affirmation of their domination). SDP's provocative behaviour and the constant quarrels with political partners and internally, signified by its leader Zlatko Lagumdžija (the party's most popular politician, Bosnian state presidency member Željko Komšić, left the party after a row with Lagumdžija), repelled many voters, who chose SDA instead at the local polls in October.

A similar process occurred in Republika Srpska, too, but for slightly different reasons. Voters gave a powerful slap in the face of Milorad Dodik and his SNSD, until recently the most powerful party in all of Bosnia. The party's result, at least in terms of mayoral posts won, was a catastrophe (15 mayors, from 41 in 2008). People instead chose to trust SDS – the party of war crimes indictée Radovan Karadžić which is believed to be more right-leaning and nationalist. And in the Croatian spectre, the traditional favourite of ethnic Croats, HDZ BiH was the clear gainer.

At first glance, the election results in Bosnia are pointing to a switch to more nationalist, traditional formations. Such an observation of course has grounds, given the background of the winning parties.⁵ Other comments suggest that the results were a blow to Bosnian social democracy.⁶ But it is wishful thinking to believe in a classic right-left political reality in Bosnia, with the corresponding policies consciously pursued by mature political parties. What *is* certain is that voters engaged in a protest vote by removing the incumbents. They did not vote for those 'nationalist' options because they were radicalised and wanted hardening of their respective ethnic groups' positions. SNSD has been the champion of ethno-nationalism in Bosnia ever since Milorad Dodik brought this party to power in 2006. His insistence of re-devolution of already ceded Republika Srpska authorities to the state level, his perpetual jabber of secession of RS from Bosnia, his insulting labels of Sarajevo as the personification of evil (he says he feels like at a hostile abroad there) – all this has confirmed SNSD and its leader as the staunchest nationalist in Bosnia by far. (The EU and the West were meanly betrayed by him when endowing him with their trust initially – as a counterbalance to the nationalist SDS – only to hear him tarnish all their efforts in Bosnia since the war.) Dodik steps up fiery nationalist talk prior to every election, and this seemed to win him votes. Just before the local polls, he even reached to blacken one of Bosnia's most emblematic achievements – the unified Bosnian armed forces. He announced he would deposit a motion in the RS parliament and then in the BiH parliamentary assembly to

⁵ See Bancroft, Ian. "Ethno-nationalism prevails in Bosnia's local elections". *Business New Europe*, 9 October 2012. Available at <http://www.bne.eu/story4070>.

⁶ "Kažnjena "bolesna" socijaldemokratija BiH ["Sick" social democracy of BiH punished]". *Oslobođenje*, 8 October 2012. Available at <http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/kaznjena-bolesna-socijaldemokratija-bih>.

about the Armed Forces as senseless and too much of a burden on the state budget.⁷ Not in October 2012. The people voted him and his rhetoric out of the local authorities. They did it because they were appalled by SNSD's 'state-capture' of Republika Srpska. The party controls all procurement via connected firms, draining tax-payers' money, and its officials in small towns and settlements across the region had become notorious for their corruption and impudence. And SDS's campaign was surprisingly socially and economically oriented, neglecting the nationalist ticket almost entirely. The people of RS did not vote nationalistically – they did just the opposite. They shouted out loud, "Enough is enough!" Similarly, SDP's attempts to install its own (stealing) officials in public companies, and the resulting political crisis, frustrated voters in the Federation. This is how the local elections in Bosnia actually signify a positive trend.

This trend was best embodied in the run-up to the local elections by an originally small, *ad hoc* protest in Banja Luka's city park, Picin Park, by scrupulous Banja Lukans opposing unbridled construction in their green areas. A lengthy quote from CNN's blog site is worthy:

Unique ongoing protests in Banja Luka, second largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are entering their third week. The protests, started on May 29, were originally aimed at protecting the environment from developers backed by the corrupt city, entity and state officials. They have now morphed into a more overtly political protest against the completely deteriorated economy, non-existent rule of law, corruption and illegal gaining of wealth by the local tycoons, all under the umbrella of politicians, including the Mayor of Banja Luka, Dragoljub Davidovic and the President of the Serbian entity, Milorad Dodik.

Hundreds of environmental protestors gather daily in the endangered park, called 'Picin Park,' in the center of Banja Luka. These protests have united citizens of all social classes, status, and religious beliefs, and are emerging to become a symbol of the fight for the restoration of human dignity. Although the construction work in the park is well underway, the protests have not ceased.

The campaign began organizing itself through online social networks. The Facebook group 'Park is Ours' quickly garnered more than 46,000 members, more than any such group organized in Bosnia and Herzegovina through a social network. Sympathizers from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and around the world have started sending photos of themselves holding small banners stating their support for the protesters in Banja Luka and their fight to preserve the city's green lungs from developers. Most recent support was received from Professor Viñas Enric, an architect from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain, and Fernando Alvarez Prozorovich, Director of Master Studies for Restoration of Cultural Monuments at the same university. "Full support for protection of this beautiful park is coming from both students and faculty of our university. Destruction of heritage is a mistake that cannot be corrected later on. Protection of heritage, such as parks, nature, and memories of all people who use them should be an obligation for all areas and their officials. We hope that your demands will be justifiably met, and we will be at your disposal to further support the campaign", said Dr Prozorovich.

Fliers circulated by the protesters noted that such gatherings were not against the law and were intended to end the climate of political fear.

⁷ "Dodik uputio inicijativu za ukidanje Oružanih snaga BiH [Dodik forwarded an initiative to disband the Armed Forces of BiH]". *Radio Sarajevo*, 8 October 2012. Available at <http://www.radiosarajevo.ba/novost/91660/dodik-uputio-inicijativu-za-ukidanje-oruzanih-snaga-bih>.

“When fear disappears, tyrants, dictators, autocrats and false authorities start to fall,” the fliers read. “It has started and will not end here.”

Psychologist Srdjan Puhalo said that the park was just a trigger for the accumulated anger of citizens of Banja Luka: “Unbearable economic, social, and political situation has led to the public reaction of a group of people in which they expressed their disagreement with the current situation, city and Entity affairs.”

Professor at the College of Philology of University of Banja Luka, Dr Danijela Majstorovic, also participates in protest walks, alongside her students: “We found ourselves in a situation where we reached the rock bottom. If we would analyze the structure of people attending the protests, we may find professors, doctors, artists, students, labor workers, people from all social classes united around the environmental protection fight, but also around the fact that they are drowning, and see these protests as a helping hand which would direct the light back on important issues, and provide them with the renewed feeling of being important again, not just an anonymous electoral body who will do as they are told.”⁸

The tendency was also illustrated by voters’ actions in the elections themselves: an unprecedentedly high percentage of invalid ballots with funny names and pictures drawn on them⁹ (signifying intentional protest) – more than 5% – and alleged instances of to vote-buying (an anonymous citizen even ran a short ad in a newspaper he/she was selling their vote for firewood or 200 Bosnian marks (€100)).¹⁰

Montenegro: The return of the emperor without clothes

A growing and confident civic movement formed throughout 2012 in Montenegro, too. In the context of the return to active state management of the tiny country’s strongman, Milo Đukanović, and the increasing allegations of corruption and state-capture in Montenegro by international watchdogs, a wave of protests by the non-government sector, trade unions and students has turned into a full-time corrective of the concentrated political power in the country. And the early parliamentary elections in October resulted, for the first time since Yugoslav times, in Đukanović’s formation, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), failing to get an absolute majority (in its traditional coalition with the Social Democratic Party of parliament speaker Ranko Krivokapić). Although this development should hardly be regarded as a shattering turnover (DPS-SDP will most probably again form the government in coalition with minority parties represented in parliament), it is at least a signal that people have started to lose faith in their unquestioned leader throughout the transition years. And this happens when Đukanović had just led Montenegro into official negotiations for membership of the European Union.

⁸ “When Fear Disappears: Protests in Banja Luka Entering Third Week”. *CNN iReport*, 13 June 2012. Available at <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-802568>.

⁹ “Batman i Chuck Norris na izborima u BiH [Batman and Chuck Norris in the elections in Bosnia]” *RTL Croatia*, 8 October 2012. Available at <http://www.rtl.hr/vijesti/zabava/520439/batman-i-chuck-norris-na-izborima-u-bih/>.

¹⁰ “Birači prodaju glasove: ‘Povoljno vičem, urlam, hrljam!’ [Voters are selling votes...]” *Radio Sarajevo*, 25 September 2012. Available at <http://www.radiosarajevo.ba/novost/90652/biraci-prodaju-glasove-povoljno-vicem-urlam-hrljam>.

Montenegro has been the EU's lovechild in the Western Balkans. It is the most prospective future member, after Croatia signed its accession treaty in December 2011 and is to join the bloc in July 2013. Montenegro was given a powerful kick in its EU integration after it separated from Serbia in 2006. Indeed, the small size of the country suggested easier reforms and faster progress. It obtained candidate status as soon as 2010 and started negotiations for accession in June 2012. If any Balkan country has some clearer EU membership perspective in times of enlargement fatigue and eurozone countries, it surely is the Adriatic republic of Montenegro (with Bosnia torn apart by 'ethnic' interests and petty squabbles, as described above; Albania just surviving a similar crisis between immature political formations challenging their election results; Macedonia vetoed by Greece because of an 'official name' dispute and gasping beneath a populist leader; Serbia slowing down under a nationalist government and serious fiscal troubles; and Kosovo just being granted a perspective for formal relations with the EU).

But Montenegro's democratic path has not been rosy all of the time, either. It is troubling, and hardly perceptible from a practical point of view, how a legitimate democracy in the 21st century can be ruled by one and the same party and have one and the same real leader for 23 years, ever since it parted with communism. Đukanović and his DPS have even been looked up to as examples of party politics and management by Western European political formations; they have taught politics to the experienced, hereditary democrats of the West. Đukanović has always been at the helm of state affairs, either as prime minister, president, or just DPS leader pulling strings from behind the scene. He this year decided to regain his formal position as country manager (after retiring as statesman but remaining DPS head in 2010) by heading the DPS party list in the 14 October general elections. Now that his coalition won the vote, he will most probably again become a prime minister.

Montenegro's most serious problem has been the allegations and open criticism by the EU of the country's record in fighting corruption and organised crime. Investigation against Đukanović himself was led in the 1990s by Italian authorities for cigarette smuggling connections. Several huge corruption scandals hit the country in the past couple of years: First, the United States securities commission filed charges against German telecom Deutsche Telekom, whose Hungarian unit Magyar Telekom owns Montenegro's operator. The allegations are that Magyar bribed Montenegrin state officials with millions of euros to get the right to acquire the Montenegrin firm.¹¹ Second, a group of municipal officials were charged and sentenced for illegally acquiring land and constructing property on a seaside area, the so-called Zavala affair.¹² And third, a BBC investigation suggested Đukanović's family was having a Montenegrin bank, Prva Banka, as 'a personal ATM machine' – illegally bailing it out

¹¹ U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. "SEC Charges Magyar Telekom and Former Executives with Bribing Officials in Macedonia and Montenegro". Press release, 29 December 2011. Available at <http://www.sec.gov/news/press/2011/2011-279.htm>.

¹² See Topalova, Evelyn. "Montenegro demonstrates efforts in the fight against corruption". *EUinside*, 6 January 2011. Available at <http://www.euinside.eu/en/news/montenegro-shows-muscles-in-the-fight-against-corruption>.

with tax-payers' money and allowing it to lend unfavourably to Đukanović-connected firms.¹³

Other difficulties Montenegro faces on its EU path originate from the structure of its political system. Basically, the most powerful and vocal opposition parties in the country represent the Serb minority. Their main efforts have been concentrated on fighting for the assertion of Serbian national symbols in Montenegrin state insignia such as the flag and anthem, as well as the right to use the 'formal' Serbian language in education.¹⁴ Thus a substantive political debate about important issues such as corruption, organised crime and media freedoms was until recently missing, though those issues have been increasingly featured in the exchange with the EU. This Serb-centred discourse had also formal negative effects on Montenegro's EU path: in 2011, the parliament, after years of delay, adopted a more inclusive electoral law which had been a requirement for opening accession talks with the EU but which was only supported by the Serb opposition (2/3 majority was needed) after a long delay, in exchange of some concessions on the use of the word 'Serbian' language in school curriculum.

What is more essential is that DPS and Đukanović have been in a practical and formal merger with the Montenegrin state for more than two decades, sidelining important debates on corruption, organised crime and the freedom of speech. Đukanović and the ruling circles have been heavily criticised for allowing attacks on too critical journalists and vehicles of opposition media outlets.¹⁵

'The return of the king?'

DPS called early elections in October 2012 (its mandate formally expired in March 2013) so that, as it announced, the government can get a clear, new mandate for the hard process of EU accession negotiations which commenced in June 2012. It is hard to guess why really it needed this. For one, Đukanović may have wanted to triumphantly return to the state institutions after contributing to the launch of the EU negotiation process informally. Or he may have anticipated a bad election result in March 2013 after a cold winter, receding economy and increasing corruption scandals. The election results showed he was prudent enough to organise the poll earlier: the DPS-led coalition (comprising also SDP and the Liberal Party) won 39 parliamentary mandates in the 81-seat assembly. The minority parties of Bosniaks, Croats and Albanians, some of which were former DPS coalition partners, got a total of 5 seats, so it is expected that a ruling majority will be formed easily. The reasons for the repeated DPS success may be

¹³ MacKean, Liz and Meirion Jones. "Documents tarnish Montenegro's EU bid". *BBC News*, 29 May 2012. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18237811>.

¹⁴ The Montenegrin and Serbian languages are almost identical.

¹⁵ See International Press Institute. "SEEMO Condemns Latest Attack on Montenegrin Daily Vijesti". Press release, 15 July 2011. Available at <http://www.freemedia.at/home/singleview/article/seemo-condemns-latest-attack-on-montenegrin-daily-vijesti.html>.

several. **First**, Montenegro *did* advance in its EU integration process, and this has been registered by the voters. **Second**, the opposition was largely disunited after unsuccessful attempts at consolidation: a Democratic Front (DF) was formed by two of the bigger parties (Serb-minority NOVA and PzP) but the largest opposition formation, the Socialists People's Party (SNP), refused to join (although part of its leadership did move to the DF and was subsequently thrown out of SNP party ranks). DF received 20 mandates, and SNP 9. A newly formed party, Positive Montenegro, was maybe the brightest example of an opposition unburdened by the 'national symbols'/Serbian ideas and strategies, but it got only 7 seats. And **third**, Milo Đukanović employed a successful nationalist tactic in his campaign – he was portraying the opposition as Serbian protégés aiming to destroy Montenegro and compromise its hard won independence from Serbia. This resonated with the people, who did not have much choice for a true opposition that was focused on the economy and social well-being and not on 'national symbols' over the last decade.

Yet, if not present in the formal political spectrum, opposition did exist in Montenegro. It gained shape in a rising civic movement that ardently opposed the policies of the DPS and proved a lot of failures of DPS – corruption, nepotism and connections with illegitimate interests of shady organisations. The Network for the Affirmation of the Non-government Sector, MANS, was the face and soul of this movement. MANS exposed numerous falsifications of elections before 2012, schemes of vote-buying and trade in influence and allegiance in favour of DPS.¹⁶ MANS organised numerous protests in the Montenegrin country where people were actually sensing the wrong policies of DPS – the bankrupt enterprises, poverty and lack of prospect. The protests were joined by trade unions and student unions. They have been a clear sign that maybe it is time for Montenegrin democracy to change fundamentally.

A meritorious Nobel Peace Prize winner

While two small Balkan countries at Europe's periphery saw true, grassroots democratic movements taking shape around election time, the European Union received, quite deservedly, the Nobel Peace Prize. The unique, supranational organisation of Europe and the world won it for being essentially a peace project, despite all its bitter faults, some of which led to bloodshed in those same Balkans. As Tim Judah aptly concludes a recent op-ed, "From Cyprus to Bosnia to Greece to the euro, any fool can point to Europe's failures. But the award of the Nobel Peace Prize is the right choice at the right time. The EU is in trouble, and the prize reminds us what the union really stands for: "peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights."

¹⁶ See Fuster, Thomas. "Montenegro und die Tücken der Stabilität [Montenegro and the perils of stability]" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 10 October 2012. Available at <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/international/montenegro-und-die-tuecken-der-stabilitaet-1.17673196>.

To those who say we would be better off without it, I say be careful for what you wish for.”¹⁷

It is because of the EU that peaceful elections are now taken for granted in the Balkans, a region torn by conflict ever since the Age of Empires. And it is because of the EU that positive signs of essential democracy and true civic participation are emerging in countries where ethnic politics, corruption and political short-sightedness are still the day’s main dish. What the EU must do is reaffirm its merit in winning the prize and support the civic movements of the Balkans with its full might and devotion. Because otherwise the Union is facing an even darker alternative: the citizens of the region may give in to desperation and disappointment in what the EU stands for and succumb to more explicit, restrictive societal ideologies coming from the not too far east.

¹⁷ Judah, Tim. “Ex-Yugoslavs Know Why EU Deserves a Nobel Prize”. *Bloomberg View*, 15 October 2012. Available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-14/ex-yugoslavs-know-why-eu-deserves-a-nobel-prize.html>.

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