

THE NEW PARLIAMENT AND THE NEED FOR A DEMOCRATIC ADVANCE

Time for a different relationship between majority and minority

At the parliamentary elections from 29 March 2009 Coalition Euro-Montenegro – Milo



by Stevo Muk

Dukanović consisting of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), Social-Democratic Party (SDP), Bosnian Party (BS) and Croatian Civic Initiative (CCI) won 48 seats. Socialist People's Party (SPP) led by **Srdan Milić** won 16 seats, the New Serbian Democracy and its leader **Andrija Mandić** 8, Movement for Changes headed by **Nebojša Medojević** 5 seats. One seat each went to parties and coalitions representing the Albanian national minority: Democratic Union

It is time to consider an alternative relationship between majority and minority in the Montenegrin Parliament

of Albanians and its candidate **Ferhat Dinosh** with the, **Nazif Cungu's** Forca, and Coalition of Democratic Council Alliance in Montenegro and Albanian Alternative with their respective candidates **Mehmet Bardhi** and **Gjergj Camaj**, as well as the Coalition Perspective, led by **Almir Hollaj**.

Democratic Party of Socialists is a heir to the Communist League of Montenegro. Its current name dates from the 1992 Congress. Since 2008 DPS is a full member of the Socialist International. Before the elections, 33 MPs in the Parliament of Montenegro came from its rank, as well as the President and an overwhelming major-

ity of Government officials.

Movement for Changes (MfC) was founded in July 2006. Its founders previously belonged to the non-governmental organisation Group for Changes, which existed from 2003 to 2006. PZP has ties with the European People's Party. After the 2006 elections it held 11 seats in the Parliament of Montenegro. A number MfC's officials and members left the party in 2009 to form Democratic Centre (DC), a party which ran for the elections in coalition with the Liberal Party (LP) but failed to pass the census.

Socialist People's Party was founded in February 1998 after the internal division of DPS. Before the last elections, SNP had 7 MPs in the Parliament of Montenegro. In the 2006 elections it ran together with NS and DSS and was a leader of the block of parties advocating state union with Serbia. President of SNP is also president of the National Council for

European Integrations (NCEI).

Social-Democratic Party of Montenegro was founded at the Congress uniting the SDPR and Socialist Party of Montenegro in June 1993. The party is a full member of the Socialist International since 1996. Before the elections, SDP had 7 MPs in the Parliament of Montenegro and a number of officials in the Government.

New Serbian Democracy (NOVA) was created in January 2009 though a merger of the Serbian People's Party (SPP) and People's Socialist Party (NSS).

Bosnian Party (BP) was founded as a party of Bosniak minority with head-

quarters in Rožaje though political merger of four parties: International Democratic Union (IDU), Party of Democratic Action (PDA), Bosniak Democratic Council (BDC) and Party of National Equality (PNE). At the previous elections BP ran together with the Liberal Party, winning 2 parliamentary seats.

Croatian Civic Initiative (CCI) is a political party founded in May 2003 with the specific goal of promoting the rights and freedoms of the Croatian nationals in Montenegro. In 2006 elections CCI ran together with DPS and SDP when it won one seat.

Democratic Union of Albanians is a party of Albanian minority founded in January 1994. Before the last elections it had one MP. One of its representatives was also the Minister for Human and Minority Rights.

The New Democratic Force – FORCA – a party of Albanians with headquarters in Ulcinj was founded in October 2005. In the previous elections it failed to pass the census.

Democratic Alliance in Montenegro and Albanian Alternative won one seat each in the previous elections, while the Albanian Coalition – Perspective made it into the Parliament for the first time in this year's elections.

Constitution of the new assembly of Montenegrin Parliament is also a chance to constitute a new relationship between the parliamentary majority and minority. This time, the majority is likely to consist of the parties members of the winning coalition plus the DUA. Parliamentary minority, on the other hand, will comprise the three larger parties – SPP, NSD and MfC as well as the three smaller Albanian national

parties, i.e. coalitions DAM and AA, Perspective and Forca.

In the past, the ruling majority in the Parliament often used various forms of pressure, obstruction and dilution of proposals, initiatives and demands coming from the opposition. The opposition, on the other hand, often resorted to boycotts of plenary sessions as a means of pressuring the parliamentary majority and the Government, largely because of the abolishment of live broadcasts of parliamentary sessions by the public service RTCG.

It is now time to think of an alternative form of relationships in the Montenegrin Parliament. During the constitution of the new assembly, and especially with regard to the appointment of deputy Speakers and presidents of parliamentary committees, the MPs should take seriously the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from the Resolution 1601 of 2008, titled "Procedural guidelines regarding the rights and obligations of opposition in a democratic parliament".

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advance functioning of the Montenegrin Parliament. Consensus between the parliamentary majority and minority on this issue would be a contribution to political culture, dialogue and respect for regulations. The Book of Regulations of the Parliament of Montenegro stipulates that one deputy Speaker should be elected, on the proposal of the opposition, from the ranks of the opposition. This was, however, not the case in the previous assembly of the Parliament, since the majority refused the proposal to accept nominations of one MP from the ranks of the Serbian List and vice president of the Serbian People's Party, with justification that these two parties did not recognise the existence of the state of



Montenegro and its symbols, rendering their nomination unacceptable for such an important state office.

In the previous assembly of the Parliament president of the Committee for Human Rights and Freedoms was an MfC MP, whereas the Committee for Economy, Finance and Budget had a president from the ranks of SPP.

During the election of presidents of the new parliamentary committees the MPs should bear in mind that the said Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommends, among other, the following:

"Presidency over permanent com-

mittees is allotted to the parliamentary groups based on proportional representation: an MP from the opposition should preside over at least one committee; presidency over the committees in charge of monitoring the Government, such as committees for budget and finance, audit or monitoring of security and information services should be offered to an opposition MP".

It would be very important to ensure that, unlike in the practice so far, in the future the parliamentary majority allows for equal treatment and debate of opposition's proposals and drafts, as well as its initiatives to fulfil Parliament's role as a check on the Government.

This would be a very significant

step towards overcoming of the current situation in the Parliament of Montenegro. The European Commission report on the progress of Montenegro for 2008 also warns that "the Parliament is not making good use of its working bodies" and that "observance of the Book of Regulations remains problematic. Moreover, the mechanisms of check and balances instituted by the Book of Regulations are not sufficiently used. The work of the Parliament is still far from efficient and transparent, especially with respect to timely scheduling of the agenda and submission of the relevant documents to parliamentary committees".

The EC says further: "the Parliament has made substantial improvements in monitoring defence and security structures, which is a key priority of the European Partnership. However, there is still space for improvement with regard to monitoring and control of the key functions of these bodies. The monitoring function of the Parliament is remains generally weak".

Adoption and implementation of the said recommendations would be very much in line with the statements issued by the representatives of the joint monitoring mission of OSCE and the Council of Europe after the last parliamentary elections, which emphasised the importance of inclusiveness in the post-election processes.

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