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The Path of Montenegro

The results of presidential elections in Montenegro, on April 15, show Milo Djukanovic, the leader of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), has won another term as head of state after serving as Prime Minister six times and as President once. Djukanovic won with almost 53.9 per cent of the votes, securing victory in the first round. "This is confirmation of Montenegro's decision to continue on its European path that will lead us to full EU membership," Djukanovic told his supporters [Dusica Tomovic, *Djukanovic Wins Montenegro's Presidential Election*, Balkan Insight, 15/04/2018].

Milo Djukanovic has held power and just about every high-level post in Montenegro over the past quarter century, so for 21 years, the country was led by the same man. He resigned as prime minister in December 2010, after suggesting that Russia had interfered in the election results, and shortly after Montenegro was granted the status of official candidate to the EU.

US Vice President Mike Pence launched a verbal assault on Russia amid his visit to Montenegro on August 2017, accusing Moscow of actions that could prevent the adhesion of Montenegro in NATO. Pence accused Russia of trying to attack the Montenegrin parliament and attempting to assassinate the country's prime minister to dissuade Podgorica from joining NATO. This situation shows the strategic importance of the tiny Balkanese nation within the process of accession to community structures by the Balkan region.

Process that Montenegro seems want to undertake with new vigour, even if aware of the endemic problems (such as corruption) that will have to be solved quickly, as demonstrated by the recent meeting. Indeed the Montenegrin Prime Minister Duško Marković and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini met in the coastal town of Tivat, in Montenegro on 19 April. They agreed that the country is making great progress towards the EU, still retaining "the role of a forerunner country in the region". At the joint presser, Mogherini said, "The doors of the European Union are open for you. This is clearly set out in the strategy for the Western Balkans that the European Union issued in February. When it comes to Montenegro specifically, we mentioned that we see some

very encouraging progress in particular on the public administration reform and economic issues, and we know how much relevance these issues have for the citizens. Montenegro needs to make further progress in the rule of law and the media freedom" [*Tivat - Duško Marković, Federica Mogherini: Montenegro is making great progress towards EU*, Government of Montenegro, 19/04/2018].

Marković told reporters, "I want to assure you that we have observed these shortcomings and weaknesses ourselves and that at the beginning of this year we held a special session of the Government at which we adopted the Dynamic Plan, so that these shortcomings can be resolved better and that we respond more responsibly to the challenges. We will do everything to fulfil the provisional benchmarks for chapters 23 and 24, thus creating a key and important assumption for entering the next phase of the negotiation process, which implies closing chapters and creating preconditions for accelerated and high-quality overall reforms in Montenegro" [*Lida Filippakis, Good progress for Montenegro in the European accession process*, Independent Balkan News Agency, 19/04/2018].

A path full of hopes, to which all the actors will have to demonstrate capacity to react at the external attempts to contain Montenegro's accession process, which is fundamental for the Balkan region as a whole.

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