

Is there any campaign for the citizens?

By: Daliborka Uljarević

These elections did bring an important democratic step forward, most of all in the awareness of our citizens who more than ever before, although still too timidly, acted on their conscience.

The parliamentary elections are over. Seen through the prism of political marketing, this was the shortest election campaign ever, visually unimpressive, with little creativity, adrenalin, glamour or the usual spectacular conventions. It also showed, however, that certain actors have clearly learned some of their lessons, and this was reflected by the outcome. There was more investment in the grassroots work, and the media ensured that the campaign retains high intensity even if it lacked the motivation and content.

The main feature of the electoral outcome, unusual in the Montenegrin context, was that nearly all competitors expressed their satisfaction with the results. The basis of this satisfaction appears to be in their expectations for the future, rather than in the current gains. The government is hoping to be able to reverse its declining ratings and maintain trust in its performance and policies. The opposition is hoping to continue to build its capacities and that in the long term it will grow strong enough to overthrow the government. In fact, as far as the opposition is concerned, the main struggle in these elections wasn't so much to take power as to rearrange the ranks for some future, hopefully more decisive battles. It will be interesting to observe if the main actors behind this project will have the strength and stamina to carry it through. Some developments within the still most powerful Democratic Party of Socialists may well help their efforts in this direction.

The loss of absolute power for the former ruling coalition brought the Bosniak Party in the political focus. It now holds the key to power – a position coveted by most political actors, but also the one that carries a lot of responsibility. Whatever the composition of the new government, this will be an important political lesson for the Montenegrin society and its citizens, who showed they were not ready for swift and radical twists, but are certainly eager to see some change. This state of affairs could have important consequences on the decision of the Bosniak Party, the same as their prior experiences and relationship with the DPS-SDP coalition. Credibility of the party hinges on whether they will engage in concrete, constructive and honest negotiations with other actors on the composition of the new government, or whip up a media performance to simulate new democratic capacities to cover up an already clinched agreement with the majority coalition.

These elections inevitably also revive the dilemma on the potential return of **Milo Đukanović** to the office of Prime Minister. If this were to be the case, Montenegro is set to plunge into permanent radicalization of the political and social scene, a continuation of the trench war on many old and some new fronts. Although many in DPS are hoping for the return of the “boss” and an “end to the rule by the kindergarten”, as some circles have vividly described a reversal of Lukšić's appointments, this would not be good for the development of the Montenegrin society, functional democracy and dynamic of European integration. Not so much because of Lukšić himself, but because of Đukanović. Lukšić, who easily promised speedy reforms, left behind a very thin record of achievements. On the other hand, Đukanović's character and political biography would be a too heavy a burden for the process of Montenegro's Europeanization, which might also end in a forced, unpleasant retirement for him... The question is: will Đukanović opt for a politically pragmatic decision to keep him in a relatively safe position, or fall prey to a political virus which doesn't let him stay still even if those he appointed are still working for him.

These elections did bring an important democratic step forward, most of all in the awareness of our citizens who more than ever before, although still too timidly, acted on their conscience. This is a powerful reminder, not only for the DPS-led coalition, but also for the opposition: it lays the foundations of political accountability, which the citizens are coming to recognise as their own weapon

to influence political developments. In some aspects it is still coming too slowly: we have not yet left behind the fascination with individual leaders and the power they wield in our society.

The author is executive director of the Centre for Civic Education (CCE).