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## **MONTENEGRO'S RULING PARTY WINS LOCAL ELECTIONS**

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The ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, DPS, party won most votes in ten out of 12 municipalities on Sunday, but will only be able to form an administration on its own in five of them.

The preliminary results show that the DPS, run by the countrys veteran leader Milo Djukanovic, secured an absolute majority in the capital Podgorica for the first time since the early 2000s.

In most municipalities, the ruling party significantly improved on its performance in local elections in 2014.

The DPS said it achieved a "great victory" in the elections, and that the results confirm the partys domination and the publics commitment to the country's EU path.

According to preliminary results, the DPS will hold 32 out of the 61 seats in Podgorica's local parliament. The opposition Democrats and URA Movement will have 17 seats and the coalition of the Socialist People's Party and the Democratic Front will hold eight.

Djukanovic's DPS also achieved an all-out victory in the municipalities of Savnik, Zabljak and Danilovgrad, Bijelo Polje and Pljevlja.

In the others, it will have to seek a coalition with the Social Democrats, SD, led by the country's parliamentary speaker Ivan Brajovic, or with the Bosniak Party and small ethnic Albanian parties.

In most municipalities, the opposition performed significantly worse than in Aprils presidential polls and the general elections in October 2016. It has claimed that the local elections were undemocratic and unfair.

Aleksa Becic, the leader of the now-strongest opposition party, the Democrats, said that elections were held in an anti-democratic atmosphere □ problematic for a country that is a candidate for EU membership.

We cannot be satisfied with the oppositions overall results... there is still great sadness, he said.

Sunday's elections were marked by numerous irregularities at polling stations and on the electoral rolls, local watchdogs reported.

The Centre for Democratic Transition, one of the watchdog organisations, reported hundreds of abuses in the election process in Podgorica, including a violation of the secrecy of the vote and a violation of postal voting procedure.

At a polling station in Podgorica, four opposition candidates for the local administration were attacked and one of them suffered serious injuries. The opposition alleged they were attacked by the DPS activists, which the ruling party denied.

The Montenegrin prosecution has confirmed that it has launched an investigation and police have been given an order to carry out checks in order to determine what happened at the polling stations on Sunday.

The Police Directorate also said that another 21 cases of violence and violations of voting procedures in 11 municipalities were reported, most of them in the capital Podgorica.

Unlike previous elections, the poll was not monitored by foreign observers.

Around 310,000 voters were registered for the Sunday's elections in 11 municipalities - almost half of the countrys population.

In most of the towns in Montenegro, the turnout was over 50 per cent, according to officials from the municipal election commissions.

In Podgorica, which accounts for more than a third of the total electorate, turnout was 64 per cent, the same as at last months presidential elections.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/montenegro-s-ruling-party-wins-local-elections-05-28-2018>

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