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## **MONTENEGRO RALLY TO DEMAND 'CORRUPT' LEADERS' RESIGNATIONS**

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A rally of dissatisfied citizens, organizers have announced, will take place on Saturday in the Montenegrin capital, Podgorica, where protesters will demand the resignations of the president and the chief prosecutor for organized crime, among others.

The informal group of intellectuals, academics, NGO activists and journalists say they expect thousands to join the protest.

They accuse the countrys eternal leader, President Milo Djukanovic, who has held power for almost 30 years, of presiding over poverty, a loss of human rights and media freedoms and systematic corruption.

They seek the resignation of Djukanovic but also of the Supreme State Prosecutor, Ivica Stankovic, and the chief prosecutor for organized crime Milivoje Katnic.

They accuse both senior law officials of ignoring evidence and not prosecuting manifest corruption in the ranks of Djukanovics inner circle.

We are awaiting judgments for election fraud, vote buying, money laundering and corruption scandals, the organizers said in a press release.

The protest #Odupri se! (Resist!) will be staged as Montenegros authorities grapple with one of the toughest political crises in years.

It follows the revelation of footage and documents that appear to implicate top officials in obtaining suspicious funds for the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, DPS, headed by Djukanovic.

In mid-January, a video clip from 2026 surfaced in which Dusko Knezevic, chairman of the Montenegro-based Atlas Group, appeared to hand the then mayor of Podgorica, Slavoljub Stijepovic, an envelope containing what Knezevic later said was \$100,000, to fund a DPS election campaign.

Knezevic, who is believed now to be in London, told the media he had been providing such secret cash to the DPS for the past 25 years.

Some saw this as the first concrete confirmation of something that has long been an open secret in Montenegro.

The DPS and Djukanovic have denied wrongdoing, insisting that all donations to the party are

recorded in the partys financial records.

The authorities have since gone after Knezevic, until recently close to the ruling elite, who now faces charges of money laundering.

Another video Knezevic released late in January and February shown a senior central bank official asking for a bribe for not sending inspectors into one of Knezevics banks.

Knezevic has also released documents claiming they prove that he helped finance Dukanovics lavish travels abroad in five-star hotels and covering his personal expenses.

The organizers of the protest also said the aim is to fight collective amnesia in the country after so many other corruption affairs passed without prosecution.

This state of affairs has gone on from the non-prosecution [in court] of state-backed cigarettes, oil, and weapons smuggling in the early 1990s through unrevealed war crimes \* to the destruction of the state and the resale of its property to domestic and foreign tycoons, they said.

Montenegro, a NATO member since July 2017 and a candidate for EU membership, is often accused of not doing enough to tackle organised crime and corruption.

Brussels has demanded more concrete results in the fight against corruption at a high political level as one of the main conditions for it making progress towards joining the EU.

Over the past years, there has been much speculation about the extent and source of Djukanovics personal wealth.

In 2010, Britains Independent newspaper placed him on a list of the worlds top 20 richest politicians.

A year earlier, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, ICIJ, estimated his wealth at 14.7 million US dollars. He denies most of the claims about his wealth.

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