

## **Vuk In Trouble**

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Following the latest attempt on his life, Vuk Draskovic has never found himself so politically isolated.

The Serbian opposition's contempt for Vuk Draskovic is such that many of its members believe he staged last week's assassination attempt to bolster his flagging reputation.

Publicly, the opposition parties have condemned the Budva shooting, in which Draskovic was slightly injured, blaming it on Slobodan Milosevic's secret police.

But, off the record, some suspect that he hatched the plot to increase his popularity and diffuse tensions within his party, the Serbian Renewal Movement, SPO.

Draskovic's unpredictability has long frustrated his supporters and other opposition activists, but it appears to have got worse since he survived an apparent assassination attempt last October - a suspicious car accident in which his wife's brother and three bodyguards were killed.

Draskovic's capriciousness provoked howls of derision earlier this month when he backtracked on a pledge to mount a united stand with other opposition parties at local and federal elections.

His explanation was that he believed that Milosevic was bound to rig the ballots - and that anyone who took part would in fact legitimise the polls. But the international community and some members of his own party suspect that he had made a pact with Milosevic to preserve corrupt SPO authorities in several major Serbian towns and cities.

Two days before the assassination attempt in Budva, Draskovic sought to refute those accusing him of making deals with the regime by sensationally proposing to the main board of the SPO that party officials resign their posts in the municipalities in question. The move backfired. His proposal was rejected out-of-hand.

The SPO leader's actions have also set him on a collision course with some in his party who believe he is trying to neuter its stand against the regime. They also resent his quarrelling with other opposition parties with whom they believe they can co-operate.

Opposition leaders are increasingly reluctant to work with him. Their dislike of Draskovic has been growing ever since last October's alleged assassination attempt.

Following the incident, they were insulted by his decision not to personally participate in meetings aimed at formulating a joint opposition electoral campaign. He provoked further anger when he failed to show up for a key opposition rally in Milosevic's home town of Pozarevac in May.

Many suspect that his recent erratic behaviour is a symptom of deteriorating psychological problems, brought about by his close scrapes with death. On the day of the Pozarevac rally, he repeatedly phoned his representatives there with contradictory orders.

Irritated by his indecisiveness, one member of his party quipped to psychology professor and leader of the Social Democratic Union, Zarko Korac, "Professor, take the phone, I think this is a case for you."

Draskovic is said to be so fearful of assassination that he rarely leaves his holiday home in Budva - and some of his closest associates have hinted that he may be on the brink of quitting politics forever. After the October incident, he told his friends several times that he'd made enough sacrifices in his battle with Milosevic.

Officially, at least, the SPO is insisting that all is well with Draskovic. "In spite of all that has happened to Draskovic, he is in very good shape and very much in the mood continue the political fight, " said his advisor, Predrag Simic.

Whether he can continue to lead his increasingly divided party from his bolt hole in Montenegro is questionable, but what's even clearer, though, is that the SPO have no one to replace him. During the last ten years of his controversial tenure as head of the party, anyone capable of succeeding him has left the party in protest at his stewardship.

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