

Balkans Briefing

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MONTENEGRO: TIME TO DECIDE

Pre-election Briefing

I. INTRODUCTION

The extraordinary parliamentary election to be held in Montenegro on 22 April 2001 is focused on the single issue of the republic's future status, whether in a continued federal union with Serbia, or as an independent state. The election was called following the break-up of Montenegro's ruling coalition at the end of December 2000 over this very question. Following the ouster of Slobodan Milošević as president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in October 2000, Montenegrin President Milo Djukanović opted to formalise the republic's break with the FRY, which in practice had already ceased to function in any meaningful sense.¹ On 28 December 2000 two of the parties in the ruling "For a Better Life" (DŽB) coalition, Djukanović's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the Social Democratic party (SDP), adopted a new Platform on relations with Serbia, which envisaged a loose association of fully independent states. The anti-independence People's Party (NS) promptly left the DŽB coalition, thus precipitating the forthcoming election.

This briefing paper examines the key campaign issues and strategies of the main participants in the election. It considers the possible courses that events may take after the election. On the basis of this analysis it makes recommendations to the international community as well as to the political actors in Montenegro and Serbia as to policy options during and after the election period. The options for Montenegro's future relationship with Serbia, the issues that will need to be resolved in defining a new relationship and the possible consequences for Montenegro and for the region of a Montenegrin move towards independence are discussed at length in the ICG report *Montenegro: Settling for Independence?*² The present briefing paper concentrates on the immediate issues connected with the election campaign.

¹ On the process by which Montenegro ceased to participate in federal institutions and its disassociation from Yugoslavia, see ICG Balkans Report N° 101, *Current Legal Status of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and of Serbia and Montenegro*, 19 September 2000.

² ICG Balkans Report N° 107, *Montenegro: Settling for Independence?*, 28 March 2001.

II. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Following the announcement of the 22 April election, a realignment occurred on the Montenegrin political scene, sharpening the division between parties favouring independence and those opposing it. The DPS and the SDP remain in coalition, and will stand in the election with a joint list under the name "The Victory is Montenegro's". The party that has most consistently advocated Montenegrin independence over the past decade, the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG), had offered to support the DPS-led administration after the departure of the NS, so as to enable the government to move without delay towards Montenegrin independence. After the election was announced, the LSCG called for the formation of a broad pro-independence coalition in order to secure the widest possible support for independence. Their call received some sympathy from the SDP, but the DPS's suspicion of the LSCG as an unreliable partner was confirmed when the latter called on the DPS and the SDP to drop any idea of a future association with Serbia as two independent states. This the DPS refused to do, and so the LSCG will stand alone in the election.

The NS joined the largest pro-Yugoslav party, the Socialist People's Party (SNP), together with the small Serbian People's Party (SNS – formed after an earlier split in the NS), forming a joint list under the name "Together for Yugoslavia". Meanwhile, the SNP, which had been allied with Milošević at the federal level, and which following Milošević's defeat switched support to the new ruling Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) coalition in Belgrade, underwent a split in its ranks. Die-hard supporters of Milošević in the SNP formed the breakaway People's Socialist Party (NSS) after former federal prime minister Momir Bulatović was ousted as SNP leader in early 2001. The NSS remains committed to Yugoslavia and to Milošević, but was excluded from the "Together for Yugoslavia" bloc.

There are also a number of ethnically based parties claiming to represent Montenegro's minority Muslim and Albanian populations. According to the most recent population census, in 1991 the Muslim population amounted to 14.6 per cent of Montenegro's total, while Albanians represented 6.6 per cent. In recent years most Muslim voters, as well as a significant proportion of ethnic-Albanian voters, have voted for mainstream non-ethnically-based parties, especially the DPS, but also the SDP and LSCG. Nevertheless, ethnic-Albanian parties (of which there are currently three) can be expected to win parliamentary seats on 22 April, helped by the provision for a special five-seat constituency covering areas in which ethnic-Albanians form a local majority. It remains to be seen how many of the five allocated seats the ethnic-Albanian parties will win, as support for the DPS probably remains strong among ethnic-Albanian voters. In any event, leaders of the ethnic-Albanian parties have made clear that they would support Montenegrin independence, so that on this key issue, they may be counted among the pro-independence parties.

Party Standings³

Political party or Coalition	For/Against independence	CEDEM	NDI
The Victory is Montenegro's (DPS + SDP)	For	37.6	44
Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG)	For	9.7	13
Together for Yugoslavia (SNP + NS + SNS)	Against	30.4	26
People's Socialist Party (NSS)	Against	2.6	4
Others		2	1
Undecided/ will not vote		17.7	12

As the above table shows, recent opinion-poll evidence is somewhat contradictory. Both polls show the pro-independence parties ahead, but the extent of their likely victory remains unpredictable. CEDEM estimates that with an election result along the lines indicated in their poll, the DPS-SDP coalition would likely fall slightly short of an absolute majority of seats in parliament. Even with the support of LSCG and ethnic-Albanian deputies, they would fall somewhat short of the two-thirds majority of seats required to change the constitution and confirm a decision in favour of independence.⁴

With the situation so unclear and with the evidence so contradictory, much remains to be played for as the election approaches. The NDI poll found that 48 per cent of respondents cited economic issues as being of greatest importance, compared with only 29 per cent who cited the status of the republic. Nevertheless, it is on the status issue that the campaigning of all of the main parties has concentrated, and it is this question which represents the key distinction separating the main parties and the coalitions in this election.

The media have been saturated with campaign coverage. State television, following agreement among the political parties, instituted a special parliamentary channel, which carries campaign coverage through much of the day. It would be naïve to imagine that such blanket coverage of party affairs is sufficient to ensure fair television coverage of the campaign. Of key importance is the fairness of political reporting in the main, regular news programmes.⁵ Nevertheless, it would be hard to contend that voters are not adequately informed of the positions of the various participants in the election. There is also a variety in the available print media, both among the Montenegrin press and in widely accessible Serbian newspapers.

That the campaign is so dominated by the status issue reflects the fact that this election is in effect a referendum before the referendum itself. If the pro-independence parties win the election convincingly, it seems unlikely that the momentum towards independence could be halted. The DPS-SDP coalition has made clear its intention, following an election victory, quickly to call a referendum

³ Poll for Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) carried out by Damar agency, 27 March – 3 April 2001. Poll by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) with Prism Research, 1 – 4 April 2001.

⁴ On the steps required by the constitution in order to bring about a change in the status of Montenegro, see ICG Balkans Report N° 107.

⁵ OSCE election monitors have in the past criticised state television for pro-government bias (see Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR observation Mission for the municipal elections in Podgorica and Herceg Novi on 11 June 2000).

on independence, which could be held in late June or the first half of July. However, the process by which a referendum result in favour of independence would be ratified is, if the procedures laid down in the constitution are adhered to, difficult. As already noted, a two-thirds majority of parliamentary deputies would be required. Djukanović appears to have recognised the importance of respecting this provision, and has referred in campaign speeches to the need to reach the two-thirds majority.⁶ Some in the ruling coalition have tried to interpret the rules differently, denying the need for a two-thirds majority.⁷ However, the constitution is unambiguous on this point, and if the constitutional procedures are followed, a two-thirds majority in parliament will be required. Thus the 22 April election is of decisive importance in determining Montenegro's future status.

While the question of Montenegro's future status is overwhelmingly the dominant issue in the election campaign, a number of other factors have been introduced. In part, these have concerned the role of key personalities, and in part they appear to represent an attempt by some pro-Yugoslav party leaders to whip up fear and unrest as a means of consolidating their electoral support and persuading waverers to turn away from the independence option.

A. Allegations of Crime and Corruption

An oft-repeated theme of SNP leader Predrag Bulatović has been to couple the struggle for the preservation of Yugoslavia with the struggle to depose Djukanović, whom he refuses to acknowledge as the rightful president of Montenegro,⁸ and accuses of leading a dictatorial, crime-ridden regime. Accusing the ruling elite of corruption, cronyism in the privatisation of state-owned firms and involvement in organised crime, the SNP has sought to portray the drive for independence as an attempt by a corrupt elite to maintain Montenegro as a lawless haven for crime and corruption, safeguarded by the republic's over-sized police force.

Accusations of criminal connections have also been levelled against the Montenegrin authorities from abroad. Indeed, war and international sanctions presented great opportunities for enrichment to well-connected individuals through a variety of semi-legal or outright criminal practices, including large-scale smuggling. Many members of the ruling elite, right up to the highest levels, as well as their families and associates, benefited from such opportunities.⁹ For all

⁶ For example, speech reported in *Vijesti*, 31 March 2001.

⁷ For example, statement by the president of the DPS Executive Committee, Miodrag Vuković, to the weekly *Monitor*, 13 April 2001.

⁸ This refusal harks back to January 1998 when, following Djukanović's narrow victory over the SNP's then leader, Momir Bulatović, in presidential elections, SNP supporters attempted, through mass demonstrations, to prevent Djukanović's inauguration.

⁹ In January 2001, the Italian Finance Minister, Ottaviano del Turco, in an interview in the Italian press, accused Djukanović of involvement in cigarette smuggling and of being closely connected with the Italian Mafia. Reacting to these claims, Montenegrin officials denied Mafia links and pointed to co-operation between Montenegro and Italy against Italian criminals sheltering in Montenegro. Smuggling rackets have been big business in Montenegro, as elsewhere in the region, although there are indications that such activities have diminished recently. Some commentators have pointed out that such smuggling is an international business involving several countries, most of them much richer than the impoverished countries of the southern Balkans, such as Montenegro (see *Monitor*, 26 January 2001, article entitled "Čarobni metak"; and *Vreme*, 18 January 2001, interview with Montenegrin Assistant Interior Minister Vuk Bošković and article entitled "Duvanska veza").

the democratic forms, Montenegro's political life is in practice dominated by a narrow oligarchy. The control of patronage remains key to political life in a poor, under-developed society, in which connection to political power is for many the means to securing even a minimal livelihood and security, let alone the enrichment that a few have enjoyed. There is no reason to believe that such patterns of behaviour are unique to the governing parties, and indeed, access to patronage is also a key political motivation in local government, of whatever political shade.

The point is that promises of institutional and economic reforms, for which Montenegro receives international assistance, should be fulfilled in practice. Some progress has already been made by the outgoing government. That it has been limited can in part be attributed to the manner in which the issue of Montenegro's relationship with Serbia (which until the recent fall of Milošević represented a real threat to Montenegrin security) has dominated the agenda. With the threat from Belgrade gone, and especially once the issue of Montenegro's status has been resolved, the challenge facing whatever government emerges from this election will be to implement the necessary reforms, to transform Montenegro into a healthy democracy with a functioning market economy.

B. The Link with Serbia

The pro-Yugoslav parties have sought to play on fears among many Montenegrins, especially in the north, close to Serbia, that with an independent Montenegro, the border with Serbia would be transformed into a hard barrier, and that passports would be required to visit Serbia. Serbia and Montenegro share deep historical, cultural and familial links. Many in Montenegro identify themselves as Serbs,¹⁰ and many others regard Montenegrins as a part of the wider Serbian family. However, there have been differences in emphasis in the identification with Serbia within the "Together for Yugoslavia" coalition. Predrag Bulatović has consistently stressed that the SNP is a Montenegrin party, defending Montenegrin interests which it believes can best be secured in a union with Serbia. At one rally he rebuked someone in the crowd who shouted "this is Serbia".¹¹ The NS and the SNS, meanwhile (especially the latter), with their long-standing identification with the "Serb nation", have stressed the defence of Serb identity in Montenegro, including the Serbian Orthodox Church. As such, they limit the appeal of their coalition among the Montenegrin majority, let alone among minorities.

Fears that independence would erect new barriers between Serbia and Montenegro have been vigorously and repeatedly refuted by DPS leaders.¹² They stress their hope that a new form of association can unite Montenegro and Serbia as independent states. In any case, they insist that a government formed by them would not erect any barriers, and the border should be open, with passport-free travel, free trade etc. They also point out that the border was not closed from the Montenegrin side, but by Serbia under Milošević, when a trade blockade was imposed on Montenegro in 2000 (since lifted).

¹⁰ 9.3 per cent, according to the 1991 census, although this figure has very likely increased as Montenegrin society has been polarised in the 1990s over the relationship with Serbia.

¹¹ *Vijesti*, 10 April 2001. "This is Serbia" was a cry raised by Serb nationalists, staking claims to territory outside Serbia, in the 1990s.

¹² For example, by Djukanović at a campaign rally reported in *Vijesti*, 6 April 2001.

C. Inter-ethnic Tension

Leaders of the "Together for Yugoslavia" coalition have repeatedly claimed that an independent Montenegro would risk falling prey to the alleged secessionist aspirations of Montenegro's minorities and the covetousness of its neighbours. They have also said that the decision on Montenegro's future status should not be decided by voters from the republic's minority communities, but that a majority of the Montenegrin/ Serb Orthodox population should decide its fate. In an article in December 2000, leading SNP official Dragan Koprivica warned that a break-up of the FRY could lead to a break-up of Montenegro. He wrote that "national-chauvinistic" forces were awaiting that moment, singling out one of Montenegro's ethnic-Albanian parties and warning of a "Kosovo II" in Montenegro. He also warned of alleged separatist forces among the tiny ethnic-Croat community in the Boka Kotorska region of Montenegro's coast as well as in northern Montenegro.¹³

On 19 March 2001, the pro-SNP daily *Glas Crnogorca* carried news of the alleged appearance of graffiti in Gusinje, an ethnic-Albanian inhabited town in Plav municipality, near the borders with Kosovo and Albania, in support of a "Liberation Army of Plav and Gusinje". Later it was reported that members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) had been active around Gusinje. Reports in the Belgrade media suggested that ethnic-Albanians in Montenegro were preparing to repeat the actions of Albanian rebels in Kosovo and Macedonia. The federal Yugoslav prime minister, Zoran Žižić, a Montenegrin and vice-president of the SNP, asserted that the Yugoslav Army would re-enter that section of the border-zone with Kosovo, in order to secure it against UCK incursions.

However, it quickly emerged that the story was without substance. Senior officials denied that there was any sign of UCK activity in Montenegro, and blamed opposition political forces for artificially trying to stir up tensions. Officials from ethnic-Albanian parties, denying the claims of UCK activity in Montenegro, asserted the loyalty of ethnic-Albanians to the Montenegrin state. A visit by the ICG to Plav found nothing to support the story of UCK activity.¹⁴ UCK graffiti did appear in the northern town of Berane and in Podgorica, but a senior Montenegrin official told the ICG that the authorities knew who was responsible for that, and that it was not ethnic-Albanians. The whole episode appeared to be an ugly attempt to stir up inter-ethnic tension and fear among the majority Montenegrin/ Serb population.

Attempts to stir up and manipulate inter-ethnic divisions did not end there. Thus at a "Together for Yugoslavia" campaign rally, SNS leader Božidar Bojović warned that Montenegro was under threat from "the Montenegrin separatist regime and militant Albanian nationalism. Albanian terrorists, having lit the flame of war in Kosovo, southern Serbia and Macedonia, now threaten Montenegro."¹⁵ At a rally in the coastal town of Ulcinj, which has an ethnic-Albanian majority, Dragan Šoć, the NS leader and former justice minister in the DŽB government, noted the existence of maps of a greater Albania including slices of Montenegrin territory. He went on to assert that Muslims and Albanians should not decide on the future

¹³ Dragan Koprivica, article entitled "Od SRJ do Savezne Republike Crne Gore", *Polje* review, 12 December 2000.

¹⁴ Reports in *Monitor*, 23 March 2001, and *Polje*, 27 March 2001.

¹⁵ Reported in *Vijesti*, 30 March 2001.

status of Montenegro, but that that right should rest exclusively with the majority Orthodox population.¹⁶ Šoć later explained that he did not dispute the right of members of minorities, as citizens, to vote. However, he saw it as inappropriate for them to decide on Montenegro's status, and warned that the exercise of that right might "open the space" for others to lay the blame on them for a result that they found unsatisfactory.¹⁷ Bojović was still more explicit at a rally in Bijelo Polje, a town with a substantial Muslim population. Referring to the division of the Serb people that the independence of Montenegro would signify, he warned that "A nation to which this happens bears a wound, bears a negative energy against those whom it decides to blame. You, gentlemen Muslims, must unfortunately accept the fact that you will be selected as the ones to blame."¹⁸

Predrag Bulatović has asserted that Montenegro would, after a victory for the "Together for Yugoslavia" coalition, retain its multi-ethnic, multi-confessional character. While saying that he did not wish to accuse any ethnic group, he has warned of irredentist claims against Montenegrin territory. A particular concern of Bulatović, aware that most Muslims are expected to vote for the DPS/SDP coalition, has been to persuade them instead to vote for the Muslim political parties, which have in recent years enjoyed only limited support.¹⁹

Amid the efforts to whip up inter-ethnic tensions, a noted historian at the faculty in Nikšić, Professor Šerbo Rastoder, a Muslim, has been a particular target of hate-mongering.²⁰ A campaign has been directed against him by an extreme Serb nationalist student body, Otpor (adopting the name of the movement that opposed Milošević in Serbia). The campaign began in March 2001, following an article by Rastoder on the controversial absorption of Montenegro into Serbia in 1918 in the newspaper *Vijesti*. The newspaper included a photograph which it incorrectly described as portraying Montenegrin patriots being hanged by the Serbian authorities. The pro-SNP *Glas Crnogorca* picked up on this, but *Vijesti's* acknowledgement of its mistake did not help Rastoder. The nationalist students of Otpor appear to find it objectionable that a Muslim should write on Montenegro's history.

Despite the stories about UCK activities and the introduction by the pro-Yugoslav parties of ethnicity as a factor in the election campaign, inter-ethnic relations in Montenegro remain, by the standards of the region, remarkably harmonious. Claims of secessionist ambitions appear to be without foundation. Leaders of the minority communities do express dissatisfaction, which is often focused on discrimination in the allocation of public-sector jobs. While members of minorities hold a number of senior state positions, in general minority groups are significantly under-represented in state structures.²¹ A particular cause of complaint, which in part reflects the exceptionally heavy-handed policing that is a feature of Montenegro, is that minority groups are significantly under-represented

¹⁶ Reported in *Vijesti*, 31 March 2001.

¹⁷ Interview in *Monitor*, 13 April 2001.

¹⁸ BBC Monitoring International Reports, 8 April 2001.

¹⁹ Reports of campaign rallies in *Vijesti*, 3 April, 6 April and 13 April 2001.

²⁰ Article entitled "Neskrivana strana mržnje", *Monitor*, 13 April 2001.

²¹ According to a survey of ministries and various public institutions carried out by the Ministry for the Defence of the Rights of Members of National and Ethnic Groups, dated November 1999, Muslims account for 5.2 per cent of employees and Albanians for 1.2 per cent, compared with their proportion in the overall population of 14.6 per cent and 6.6 per cent respectively, according to the 1991 census.

in the republic's very large police force. The ethnic-Albanian parties stress the need for self-government in areas where Albanians are concentrated,²² and in particular claim the right to control local appointments in public institutions (such as schools) in places (especially Ulcinj) where they control the local government. That the central authorities often appoint ethnic-Albanians from among supporters of the ruling parties to such positions is regarded with particular resentment.

The fact that a large proportion of the ethnic minority communities participates fully in mainstream Montenegrin political life may be regarded as a positive sign of the relatively healthy state of inter-communal relations in Montenegro. That there are matters that need to be improved is certainly the case. The deputy speaker of parliament, Rifat Rastoder, a Muslim, has proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the legal and constitutional provisions entrenching the rights of minorities, drawing on the experience of other European countries.²³ If the positive experience of the full and constructive engagement by Montenegro's minorities in political life is to continue, the government which emerges from the 22 April election would be wise seriously to address the grievances of minorities, particularly regarding discrimination.

For his part, Djukanović has stressed the commitment of his party to the rights of minorities and has vigorously condemned the attempts of his political opponents to whip up inter-ethnic tension.²⁴ Leaders of the "Together for Yugoslavia" coalition appeared to react to widespread criticism of their statements regarding minorities by altering their rhetoric. At a rally in Berane on 15 April, Predrag Bulatović asserted that Montenegrins must respect other peoples, that Muslims had nothing to fear from them, and should not be fooled by Djukanović. Bojović expressed confidence that Muslims had seen through Djukanović and turned their backs on him.²⁵

D. Fears of Electoral Theft

A pattern in past elections has been the habit of SNP leaders of crying foul and claiming that their defeat was the result of electoral fraud. That some (though not all) SNP leaders, including Predrag Bulatović, accepted defeat in the municipal election in Podgorica in June 2000 with better grace may have reflected satisfaction that at the same time the SNP-led coalition wrested control of Herceg Novi from DŽB. Again in the campaign for the April 2001 election, a repeated theme of the "Together for Yugoslavia" coalition is to raise fears that the governing parties are preparing an electoral fraud that will deprive them of their rightful victory.²⁶ Senior SNP figures have asserted that their research shows that

²² The Democratic Union of Albanians (UDS), one of Montenegro's three ethnic-Albanian parties, has proposed, in November 2000, a "Platform on the Political and Legal Frameworks of the Self-Government of National Minorities in Montenegro".

²³ Rifat Rastoder, *Investment in the Future: The Defence of Minority Peoples* (Podgorica, 2001).

²⁴ In a speech in Bijelo Polje, Djukanović described attacks on the equal rights of minorities as attacks against Montenegro as a whole, and asserted that the freedom of members of minorities is a condition for the freedom of every Montenegrin (reported in *Vijesti*, 12 April 2001).

²⁵ *Vijesti*, 16 April 2001.

²⁶ See for example speech by Predrag Bulatović, reported in *Vijesti*, 11 April 2001.

they will receive 170,000 votes.²⁷ The meaning is clear: if the election does not yield the result that the SNP claims that it expects, then it may follow its practice in past elections and accuse the authorities of fraud.

Concrete allegations of irregularities and malpractice have been raised. Belgrade and pro-SNP media pointed to the recent request to Belgrade from the Montenegrin interior ministry (MUP) for large quantities of application forms for identity cards and passports as evidence that a plan was afoot fraudulently to boost the vote of the ruling parties. The MUP insisted that there was nothing irregular in such a request, and offered to provide the serial numbers of the forms to the OSCE-ODIHR election monitoring mission, so that it could check that there was no malpractice.²⁸ The pro-Yugoslav parties also raised alleged irregularities in the electoral register, and presented over 7,000 cases. The electoral commission has been checking all allegations of irregularities in the register, and putting right those that are found to be justified. In addition, Prime Minister Filip Vujanović has met with the leaders of the "Together for Yugoslavia" parties in order to ensure that the controls designed to guarantee the fairness of the election will be as tight as possible.²⁹

The election will be monitored by domestic observers as well as by international observers of the OSCE-ODIHR election-monitoring mission. The mission of the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) will make its assessment of the conduct of the election. The OSCE's position in Montenegro has been complicated since the establishment of an OSCE Mission to the FRY in March 2001. The OSCE already had a presence in Montenegro, through an office of the ODIHR. However, encouraged by OSCE member states, and supported by the current OSCE Chair-in-Office (Romania), the Mission in Belgrade has sought to extend its area of responsibility to include Montenegro.³⁰ A representative of the Chair-in-Office, in a report on the situation in the FRY to the OSCE Permanent Council on 10 April 2001, expressed concern that the election campaign in Montenegro was focusing mainly on the issue of independence and that the election might not be fair.³¹

It is vital that the OSCE, as an organisation which monitors elections, be seen to be absolutely neutral as between the various political options in elections that it observes. The OSCE-ODIHR election-monitoring mission must be allowed to do its job, professionally and without interference, and its assessment of the conduct of the election should not be pre-empted by other institutions within the OSCE or by OSCE member states. That the larger OSCE member states, including the United States and EU members, are opposed to Montenegrin independence is well-known and has been repeatedly stated. But in order for the OSCE to maintain its credibility, its impartiality needs to be strictly respected and member states should eschew any temptation to oppose Montenegrin independence moves also

²⁷ Article in *Vijesti*, 9 April 2001, entitled "DPS i SNP znaju rezultate izbora prije nego što će oni biti održani".

²⁸ *Vijesti*, 6 April and 9 April 2001.

²⁹ *Vijesti*, 12 April and 14 April 2001.

³⁰ The Head of the OSCE Mission to the FRY, Stefano Sannino, visited Podgorica in early April together with a representative of the Chair-in-Office. A senior Montenegrin official told the ICG that the sole purpose of this visit was to extend the responsibility of the OSCE Mission to the FRY to include Montenegro.

³¹ *VIP Daily News Report*, 11 April 2001.

through the OSCE. The regular OSCE-ODIHR Mission in Montenegro has been highly successful in recent years in helping to calm the sometimes fraught political atmosphere through dialogue with all political sides precisely because it has maintained its strict neutrality on the key issues dividing Montenegrins. It is doubly important at the time of an election that the neutrality of the election observation mission should not be compromised.

Reacting to indications that the pro-Yugoslav parties might be preparing to dispute the fairness of the election, Djukanović accused them of planning a scenario similar to that of 14 January 1998.³² In that month, following the split in the DPS over Djukanović's opposition to Milošević, and his defeat of former DPS leader Momir Bulatović in presidential elections, supporters of the Bulatović faction, which went on to form the SNP, tried to prevent Djukanović's inauguration with violent street protests. Current SNP leader Predrag Bulatović responded that Djukanović should not even mention 14 January 1998, a date associated (by the SNP) with electoral fraud. He accused Djukanović of trying to fix the election again, and with huge, but perhaps unconscious irony from the leader of a party that was allied with Milošević until October 2000, he warned that such an attempt would not work, that it had been tried in Serbia but had been foiled by the "happening of the people".³³ Šoć also refuted Djukanović's accusation, asserting his belief that the pro-Yugoslav parties would win the election, and so would have no need to foment unrest.³⁴

III. OUTLOOK

As already discussed, and contrary to the claims of the anti-independence parties, opinion-poll evidence would appear to suggest that a victory for the pro-independence "The Victory is Montenegro's" coalition is likely. If this is so, the extent of the victory will be of key importance. If the pro-independence parties win a two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats, then a speedy referendum and moves towards independence will follow. If not, then the new government will likely seek an accommodation with the pro-Yugoslav parties that would enable plans for a referendum to proceed. This may prove difficult, especially if the pro-Yugoslav parties dispute the election outcome. These parties have also indicated that they might boycott an independence referendum over objections to the referendum law.³⁵

The attitude of Belgrade may prove important. While the leaders of the DOS authorities have persistently called for the preservation of the federation between Serbia and Montenegro, albeit re-defined, both FRY President Vojislav Koštunica and the Serbian prime minister, Zoran Djindjić, have made clear that if Montenegrins opt for independence, so be it. DOS leaders have said that Belgrade will not settle for less than the proposal for a functioning federation put forward by Koštunica in January 2001, and that if Montenegro does not agree to that, then the two republics should separate in a civilised manner.³⁶ Djindjić

³² *Vijesti*, 11 April 2001.

³³ *Vijesti*, 12 April 2001. The phrase "happening of the people" was used by Serbian nationalists to praise the pro-Milošević orchestrated demonstrations in the late 1980s.

³⁴ BBC Monitoring International Reports, 11 April 2001.

³⁵ For a discussion of the referendum law, see ICG Balkans Report N° 107.

³⁶ On DOS attitudes towards Montenegro, reports in *Vijesti*, 9 April, 10 April and 11 April 2001.

reportedly favoured the idea of a three-year "moratorium" on Montenegro's moves towards independence, but this has been categorically rejected both by Podgorica and by Koštunica, who insists that the status of Montenegro must be resolved, one way or the other, soon.³⁷

While DOS of necessity entered a coalition with the SNP at the federal level in October 2000, in order to secure a majority in the federal parliament, DOS leaders have generally not concealed their distaste for Milošević's former allies in Montenegro. It is widely believed that Koštunica in particular is close to the NS, which, while devoted to the union with Serbia, opposed Milošević. The SNP's absolute opposition to the transfer of Milošević or other FRY citizens to the international war crimes tribunal (ICTY) in The Hague has held up the passing of a federal law on cooperation with the ICTY. The federal justice minister, Vladan Batić, in a recent interview commented that perhaps after 22 April the SNP's position would no longer be relevant, as there might no longer be a federal state.³⁸ DOS officials are already talking of the need for Serbia to be redefined as an independent state in the event of a break with Montenegro, and for new Serbian elections to be held in that case.

Thus it appears that Belgrade is resigning itself to the possibility of a split with Montenegro. In the event of an election victory for the pro-independence parties in Montenegro, it is quite possible that Belgrade would quickly recognise reality and give up thoughts of preserving the common state. In that case, and even if the pro-independence parties do not have a two-thirds majority in the Montenegrin parliament, any thought that the pro-Yugoslav Montenegrin parties might continue to resist independence, by using the lack of the necessary parliamentary majority to block further moves, would probably lose all sense. Any notion that opponents of independence might resist independence moves other than through political means would have no perspective unless supported from Belgrade, which since the fall of Milošević is hardly conceivable. While some pro-Yugoslav politicians mutter darkly about the possibility of "spontaneous" acts of resistance from the people, senior party officials rule out calling for resistance to independence moves, other than through political means.³⁹

Thus it may be that even if the pro-independence parties fall short of the two-thirds majority, that would not halt the momentum towards independence. It is important that the legal procedures should be strictly followed. There have been suggestions that, in the event that the pro-independence parties do not gain a two-thirds parliamentary majority, a new government might, with the agreement of the Constitutional Court, decide to ignore the present constitution. This might be justified by saying that it was an integral part of the defunct federal system which had just been rejected in a referendum. Such a course would not be advisable, as in a situation in which Montenegrins are deeply divided, it is especially important to insist upon strict observance of the established rules by all sides. An election outcome, assuming that it is certified by the OSCE election monitors as accurately reflecting the will of the electorate, should be accepted by the pro-Yugoslav parties, and thoughts of an election or referendum boycott

³⁷ Article entitled "Moratorijum", *Monitor*, 13 April 2001.

³⁸ Interview for the Belgrade news agency BETA, reported in *Vijesti*, 11 April 2001.

³⁹ In an interview with Belgrade television (reported in *Vijesti*, 16 April 2001), Predrag Bulatović asserted that he would accept a vote in favour of independence, and that the election would not lead to a war.

should be discarded. By the same token, the pro-independence parties should observe the constitutional provisions for changing Montenegro's status.

Concerns about the readiness of the DPS to adhere to the rules have been given added weight by recent events in the northern town of Berane. Following the break-up of the DŽB coalition last December, the DPS and SDP no longer held a majority of seats in the municipal assembly. The SNP, SNS and NS together held a majority. This situation did not immediately lead to a transfer of power, as long as the president of the assembly, Sveto Mitrović of the DPS, did not call an assembly session. In late March, however, Mitrović, who opposes Montenegrin independence, announced that he was no longer a DPS member and called an assembly session, thus enabling the SNP-led majority to take power. The SNP-led coalition quickly consolidated its authority, replacing the heads of local public institutions and two vice-presidents of the assembly. However, the local DPS hit back, with the directors in public enterprises in the town organising strikes that made it difficult for the new authorities to function, leading to speculation that the central authorities might take over local power.⁴⁰

The situation in Berane is complicated. Perhaps especially disturbing to the DPS were speculations in the pro-SNP *Glas Crnogorca* that other local DPS leaders in Bijelo Polje, Budva and Danilovgrad might be prepared to follow Mitrović's example and also defect.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Berane case gives the pro-Yugoslav parties, which assert that they have adhered to the legal procedures, the unfortunate impression that the DPS is prepared to bend the rules to suit its interests.

IV. INTERNATIONAL POLICY

It seems likely that international pressure on the Montenegrin government to draw back from its independence plans will not end, even with an election victory for the pro-independence parties. The ICG has argued that the international community should adopt a neutral stance on the status of Montenegro and the future relationship with Serbia, and should be prepared to accept whatever arrangement Serbia and Montenegro can agree upon.⁴² The Montenegrin authorities are set on the independence course, despite intense international pressure, and it appears that they would be deflected only by domestic factors, such as a disappointing election result. With Belgrade apparently ready to accept Montenegrin independence, continued international pressure on Montenegro to draw back seems doubly strange. Yet at a meeting on 11 April, the Contact Group, comprising the United States, Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Russia, reiterated its support for the maintenance of the Yugoslav federation. In a barely disguised threat, the statement linked Montenegro's refraining from unilateral actions with the continuation of political, economic and financial support.⁴³ However, if the election result favours the pro-independence parties, then the international community will have no choice but, belatedly, to reconcile itself to an independent Montenegro.

⁴⁰ Article entitled "Raspleteno – zapleteno", *Polje*, 10 April 2001.

⁴¹ *VIP Daily News Report*, 29 March 2001.

⁴² See ICG Balkans Report N° 107.

⁴³ *Reuters*, 11 April 2001.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The international community should discontinue its approach of pressurising Montenegro into abandoning the aspiration for independence. Rather, it should adopt a neutral stance on the status of Montenegro and the future relationship with Serbia, and should be ready to help the two to find a mutually satisfactory basis for their new relationship.
2. The international community should continue to assist Montenegro with aid and technical support for reforms. Assistance should be conditional on progress in carrying out reforms, and should not be linked to the issue of Montenegro's status.
3. The OSCE-ODIHR election observation mission should be allowed to do its job professionally and without interference. OSCE member states should respect the impartiality of the OSCE between the various political options in Montenegro, and should refrain from using the OSCE as a vehicle for opposing Montenegrin independence.
4. The Montenegrin authorities should adhere strictly to the constitutional procedures regarding a change in the republic's status, including the requirement for a two-thirds parliamentary majority.
5. The Montenegrin authorities should ensure that the election campaign is conducted in a free and fair manner. Any tendency for the incumbent to have an advantaged position in state media should be eschewed.
6. The anti-independence political parties in Montenegro should continue to participate constructively in political life.
7. All political parties should respect the equal rights of all citizens of Montenegro, including members of ethnic minorities, and should avoid any actions or statements that might encourage inter-ethnic tension.

Podgorica/Brussels, 18 April 2001

MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES AND COALITIONS IN MONTENEGRO

- “The Victory is Montenegro’s” coalition (pro-independence governing coalition):
 - Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)
 - Social Democratic Party (SDP)

- “Together for Yugoslavia” coalition (main opposition, anti-independence coalition):
 - Socialist People’s Party (SNP)
 - People’s Party (NS)
 - Serbian People’s Party (SNS)

- Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG, pro-independence)

- People’s Socialist Party (NSS, anti-independence, pro-Milošević)

- Democratic Union of Albanians (DUSH, ethnic-Albanian party)

- Democratic League in Montenegro (LDneMZ, ethnic-Albanian party)

- Party of Democratic Prosperity (PPD, ethnic-Albanian party)