

Montenegro and U.S. Policy

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The United States has provided remarkable political support and economic aid to Montenegro since the republic began to break free of the Milosevic regime in 1997. Indeed, the United States broke the ice on providing aid to Montenegro when the EU was still reluctant to do so.

Nevertheless, the policy objectives of the United States and Montenegro, while similar in many ways, have been somewhat different in others. While both wanted to see the end of the Milosevic regime, and favored multi-ethnicity, democracy and free markets in both Serbia and Montenegro, the United States saw Montenegro as a symbol of a democratic alternative to Milosevic's rule within Yugoslavia. Montenegrin leaders saw the removal of the Milosevic regime as the first step in rectifying a long history of inequality between the two republics. This difference of views was manageable while the immediate objective was to remove Milosevic. However, with the victory of Serbian democrats last October, the differences were thrown into sharper relief. Administration officials were primarily interested in bolstering Serbian democrats. They were concerned that President Djukanovic's support for independence in December 2000 could undermine political stability in both republics.

Bush Administration officials say the Administration favors a "democratic Montenegro within a democratic Yugoslavia." They have said that the results of the April 22 elections show that public opinion in Montenegro remains divided on the issue of independence. In addition to lingering concerns about the impact of Montenegrin independence on the position of democrats in Serbia and the internal stability of Montenegro, they are also reportedly concerned that the collapse of the federation could hurt the chances of keeping Kosovo as part of Yugoslavia, perhaps as a loose, tripartite federation or confederation. The U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244, which is the framework for international community involvement in Kosovo, supports the territorial integrity of the FRY, but does not mention Serbia.

A substantial number of U.S. analysts dispute the view that Montenegrin independence would be destabilizing. They believe that, on the contrary, an independent, democratic Montenegro would boost regional stability. I don't want to repeat these arguments, as they are comprehensively laid out in Dr. Bugajski's paper. I agree that the FRY is dead. I think the important thing is that the issue of Montenegro's status be resolved in a democratic and transparent way. There have been some recent signs of movement toward a consensus on a process for resolving this issue. Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindic has urged Montenegro to hold a referendum by the end of the year to settle the issue of Montenegro's status one way or the other. In Montenegro, SNP leader Predrag Bulatovic has said a referendum would not be a tragedy, under certain circumstances.

Over the past five years, Montenegro has found some of its staunchest supporters in the U.S. Congress. Congress exempted Montenegro from U.S. sanctions against the FRY. Congress has earmarked or recommended aid for Montenegro that are very substantial, given the republic's small size. U.S. aid has provided vitally-needed budget support, as well as assistance for political and economic reform. According to the 2002 AID Congressional Presentation, the United States provided \$41 million in such aid to Montenegro in FY 1999 and \$42 million in FY 2000. The FY2001 foreign operations appropriations did not include an earmark for Montenegro, but the conference report said that Montenegro "should" receive \$89 million.

Congress has perhaps differentiated itself from both the Clinton and Bush Administrations on the issue of whether the United States should use this aid to pressure Montenegro to back off on its support for independence. In November 2000, Senator McConnell reportedly warned the Clinton Administration against trying to do this. In its 2002 budget, the Bush Administration requested \$145 million for the FRY as a whole, but did not provide a breakout of the amount allocated to Montenegro. The House Appropriations Committee passed the FY 2002 foreign operations appropriations bill (H.R. 2506) on July 10. The committee's report "directs" the Administration to provide \$60 million in aid to Montenegro. The report says the committee "strongly supports" aid to Montenegro and expresses disappointment that the Administration did not provide a separate line item for Montenegro in its request.

One interesting future issue to look at may be Montenegro's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). President Djukanovic has pledged full cooperation with the ICTY, including on the issue of extraditions, but has transferred no suspects yet. Some Montenegrins may have personal reasons to avoid cooperation with the ICTY. On March 1, 2001, the ICTY issued indictments against persons responsible for the shelling of the Croatian city of Dubrovnik by Yugoslav Army troops in 1991. While the ICTY has not publicly disclosed the names of those indicted, it is possible that Montenegrins are among them, given the large role played by forces from Montenegro in operations against Dubrovnik. This issue could cause controversy within Montenegro, as it has within Serbia.