

# **U.S.-Montenegrin Policy Forum INTRODUCTION ON MONTENEGRO AT CSIS**

**Thursday, March 07, 2002**

**12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.**

**Speech Given by Branko Lukovac,  
Foreign Minister of Montenegro**

## **1. Montenegro before yet another turning point**

I wish to express my thanks to CSIS and especially to Mr. Janusz Bugajski, for organizing this gathering as another opportunity to talk about Montenegro today. Often, over the last decade and a half, Montenegro was at the turning point to make a critical decision. We were given opportunities to take bold, uneasy, and somewhat risky decisions that would determine the future of Montenegro. To mention just some of them: For example, in autumn 1988 and January 1989, during the street offensive, or the so-called *anti-bureaucratic revolution* of new Serbian policy headed by Milosevic, our democracy was defeated. Or in autumn 1991, during the Hague Conference on Yugoslavia, when Montenegro joined others in accepting Lord Carrington's proposal for a confederated state. Under pressure from and treatment by Serbia, such position was later cancelled and our democracy, again, was lost. And finally, during the last two final years of Milosevic's Serbia, when the war against NATO was declared, or when Montenegro's equality was erased in a unilateral change of the Constitution of FRY, in July 2000. Again, we did not manage to escape the embrace.

Now, again, we are before such a critical decision. Therefore, I consider this gathering as unique opportunity in assessing the significance of this newest challenge and in advising the way to follow.

## **2. What is our choice?**

Our choice, declared many years back, is a democratic and prosperous society, transformed in accordance with free market principles, European values and standards, oriented towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Montenegro has legitimate aspirations to be part of the international community by our sovereign decision, as an equal member of world nations. It is not our plan to join the European Union, the United Nations or any other international structures as a part of any other state or federation with Serbia for a number of reasons: historical, legal, political, economic, etc. Not least because of a real danger to lose our cultural, national and state identity, as was so often the policy of the Serbian elite over the centuries, which has been so dramatically demonstrated during the last 15 years.

Therefore, our aspirations are not that much about independence, as about the kind of the future that the free and sovereign Montenegro is personifying. Whether our future is democracy and respect of human rights for all, inter-ethnic tolerance and harmony, or the opposite - intolerance and national and religious haters, as demonstrated by the adversaries that have identified themselves with the ideas and aims of Milosevic or Karadzic only two months ago on the streets of Podgorica or Berane. Is it to be market economy and reformed and prosperous society of the western standards, attractive for foreign investors, or a primitive, distributive economy, hostile for private ownership and foreign investors; are we going to cooperate with Hague Tribunal for war crimes; or to prevent extradition and Tribunal's work, as well as to avoid our own responsibility to bring war criminals to justice.

### 3. EU involvement to prevent independence of Montenegro

*What is the role of the EU in resolving the problems between Montenegro and Serbia?* Unwillingly and unequipped, the EU got involved for too long in the crises in the Balkans with failed policies and often inadequate tools used to resolve the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. However, it became euphoric about the sudden and long awaited change in Serbia, in September-October 2000, with the removal, and later arrest, of Slobodan Milosevic.

*What are the reasons that prompted the EU to take a negative stand regarding Montenegro's position, from the moment of change in Serbia?* One reason is to ignore the sufferings and the huge cost that Montenegro has paid as a victim of Serbia's policy. A second reason is to forget the significance of Montenegro's challenge and defeat of Milosevic's policy in 1997, including Montenegro's assistance of the opposition in Serbia, as well as its help to the EU in preparing for a final showdown in 2000. To underestimate the Montenegro's assistance to refugees from all over the former Yugoslavia, especially from Kosovo in 1999, is an additional reason. Or to ignore the unique record of Montenegro in maintaining peace and stability in its own multi-ethnic society in spite of such an environment could be another reason.

To explain such a stand of the EU, it is not enough to mention the concern for the stability of the region, traditional preference for the status quo, fatigue with the Balkans, the danger of the domino effect, lack of enthusiasm for small states as newcomers to the EU, or the like. Our doubts are that some EU strong-member states wish to rehabilitate themselves for the sanctions and military campaign in the 1990s, and somehow, to compensate Serbia for lost ambitions and wars. One can, also, have the reminiscence of the consistent negative position of certain European states towards Montenegro's statehood, since WWI.

Let me remind you that, until the failed talks between the leaders of Montenegro and Serbia on 26 October 2001, the EU was not very ambitious to be directly involved in the dispute. At the same time the EU was discouraging member states to have political contacts with democratic government of Montenegro. The EU has not approved any new economic program for Montenegro since the changes in Serbia. And, what was Significant was that the EU was increasingly interested in contacts with pro-Serbian nationalist parties in Montenegro, providing them indirectly a kind of safety belt. Dissatisfied with the outcome of the meeting between the leaders of Montenegro and Serbia on 26 October last year, and with their agreement to convene the referendum as a way of deciding on future relations, the EU entrusted Mr. Solana to get involved with so called good offices, to facilitate a dialogue in order to rescue the Federation.

Three months later, the original idea and intention was presented in the form of the proposal of general principles for a solution. The essence was to maintain the loose Federation (with the new name Union of Serbia and Montenegro), with moratorium on Referendum, or the provision to convene it after several years. Such a proposal has the weight and support of EU and U.S., and therefore, the leadership of Montenegro cannot ignore it without risks for immediate and long-term political, economic and social implications.

The rejection of the EU plan may unite those powerful political and economic factors against the democratically elected authorities of Montenegro in preventing the referendum and its positive outcome, or in rejecting the referendum results. That may also include the strengthening of the pro-Serbian opposition in Montenegro to win elections (local, presidential and possibly early parliamentary). There is also the option to withhold assistance programs of the EU and member states. But the weaknesses of the plan are numerous:

- The imposed solution would create huge negative feelings, dissatisfaction, frustration and even resistance, across the majority of the population in Montenegro, including minorities that have suffered a lot during the reign of Serbian aggressive nationalism and can

gradually generate instability inside Montenegro and within Montenegrin-Serbian relations with negative implications for the region;

- The arrangement to create a new federation, easily acceptable in Montenegro, will open the prospect for a referendum after several years, creating prolonged uncertainty and negative behavior for genuine, serious and substantive far-reaching reform processes and for the democratization of the country;
- Politically, the pro-Serbian, meaning ex-Milosevic and ex-Karadzic, supporters will behave as victorious and will capitalize on such an outcome by all available means;
- Montenegro would, as a result, be more closely involved in most of the problems that will for many years to come, pressure the Serbian society: huge and mighty machinery developed and trained for wars, with the presence of thousands of war criminals; incompatible economic systems where specific interest of Montenegro would gradually be ignored; regional disputes with Vojvodina, Sandzak, etc.;
- Further on, there would be efforts to adjust to the new architecture in the region, so that the deeper association of such a new federation into EU, Council of Europe, Partnership for Peace, WTO etc, would cement established interim institutions, relations and entities. This may make promised Referendum, by time, impractical, inopportune, to be arranged.

#### **4. What is our answer?**

Democratic Montenegro has won the support of our citizens, of our neighbors and all others when, in the mid 1990s, a decision was taken to adopt values and standards of the modern world, instead that of aggressive nationalism, self-isolation and confrontations with our neighbors. This is still valid policy and a fundamental choice of the present democratically elected authorities. It is for this reason that we have accepted good offices of EU, in spite of grossly biased and wrong position regarding Montenegrin- Serbian relations. Because of the very same reasons - of cooperation, of dialogue with the EU and of our European future - our President expressed readiness to consider suggestions about the timing of the referendum as a democratic way of choosing our form of state relations. And I wish to point out - timing of the referendum, not the determination to fully restore, through the democratic process, our statehood and our own place in international community.

It would be contrary to our fundamental, present and long-term interests and aspirations for becoming part of a united Europe, to ignore or reject the EU's involvement and proposals, even with all weaknesses and risks as mentioned above. But the bottom line is to consider their proposals are the following:

- If there is no any other solution but to postponed proclamation of independence, or the referendum on independence, then there should be a clear cut agreement of all relevant role players, including the EU and the U.S., with specific and firm guarantees for organizing such a referendum in a given time; transitional institutions of Montenegro and Serbia should be as rational as possible, with full equality of two republics in sharing them.
- That the reform process will continue unabated with all pillars of our economic reform program, based on Euro, our foreign trade and custom sovereignty, as well as our free tariff and trade policy under the responsibility of the authorities of Montenegro;
- It is understood that *conditio sine qua non* to adopt such a transitional arrangement, is that it should be accepted by all the parties that make or support present Government of Montenegro and that there is no substitution in a different type of the coalition with those that have been or still are part of the policy of haters, of war, or against Montenegro as a state.

#### **5. US policy towards Montenegro**

Montenegro has enjoyed cooperation, partnership and support of the U.S. during the second half of the 1990s, in confronting policy of Milosevic, defeating Serbia on democratic elections and providing secure shelter and a springboard for the democratic alternative of Serbia, as well as to the international community. Such a partnership culminated during the exodus of Kosovars in the

campaign in 1999. We still hope that the U.S. will not forget or neglect the paramount role Montenegro has played during the crisis, as well as the whole history of our relations, and that the U.S. will always remain consistent with the meaning of principles of justice. Irrespective of our Euro-orientation, the U.S. remains the most valuable friend of Montenegro.

Of course, we do not expect the U.S. Administration to change anything essential in the policy to back and assist the EU in playing ever increasing role in European affairs. But, given the experience of the past decade in the Balkans, there is a need for caution. Too much effort, time and cost have been invested to stop the war, to establish new realities and relations, and to open new hopes and avenues. Montenegro has played a positive role and has started, with the support of the U.S., reform programs. A heavy handed policy and management of a dialogue with the EU, may risk to undermine what was and still is so rarely in this troubled region a peaceful, stable, and multiethnic achievement, experience, and example.

***\*The text of the original speech has been edited.***

### **Discussion**

**Present State of Negotiations:** An agreement has been made between the negotiating parties (Montenegro, the government in Belgrade, and the European Union) that no details on the talks are to be disclosed as long as the process is active. The present situation should be seen as a transitional period. No specific date has been set for the referendum on independence although the Montenegrin government would prefer that it be held in May 2002. However, if there are fears that a May referendum will pose a risk to stability, then the authorities are willing to postpone the ballot. Throughout the negotiations, the government in Podgorica has made clear that they are unwilling to enter into partnerships with politicians who once formed the backbone of the Milosevic regime. The referendum is a challenging issue for the government, because it is a minority government. If the referendum were to be postponed, the government may lose the support of the Liberal Party in parliament.

**Albanian Community in Montenegro:** According to all parliamentary discussions and opinion polls, it is generally acknowledged that the Albanians in Montenegro are in favor of independence. This is understandable and justified by the contrasting experiences Albanians have had in Serbia and in Montenegro. Montenegro has pursued a multiethnic approach in its political and economic development.

**Donor Assistance Plans:** There is no new position on assistance for Montenegro from the European Union. Montenegro is still receiving previously arranged assistance programs from decisions made two to three years ago. However, no new programs have been launched since the fall of Milosevic in Serbia in October 2000, which subsequently received some 500 million DM for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Montenegro did not receive anything from these allocations and no new programs have been approved. On the American side, Montenegro has received strong support from the U.S. Congress. Podgorica expects to establish long-term economic programs with assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Illegal Activities:** There are two aspects of this issue. First, the underground economy was a matter of survival during the period of sanctions imposed by the international community on the whole of Yugoslavia. Second, is the question of political manipulation. The criminal allegations against the Montenegrin government and its President were all framed after Djukanovic defeated Milosevic's proxies in the elections, and they were orchestrated by Milosevic's parties and the media. On several occasions, Montenegro has proposed joint programs with the EU to help establish the infrastructure and machinery to fight organized cross-border crime. However, neither the EU nor the U.S. have been forthcoming in developing this idea. However, as a sign for future close cooperation, an Italian Interpol office has been opened in Montenegro.

**Delaying the Referendum:** The Montenegrin government is concerned about the possible negative effects a postponement would have on the economic reforms currently being implemented. There are constant pressures to install federal authorities, especially in the Customs Administrations, and to go back to the use of the *dinar*. The uncertainty surrounding the final resolution of Montenegro's status is also not conducive to attracting foreign investment.

**Future Relations:** A framework based upon common interests is more realistic than the formation of another federation. The future is not in ethnic partitions and strict borders as the needs to be movement without restrictions. Montenegro lacks confidence that the EU is handling the dialogue in the proper way. From the outset, the EU sided with Kostunica's proposals. The U.S. might be better equipped to understand the situation although it is understood that the EU has primary responsibility for European affairs. It is important that the U.S. continues its support for economic programs in Montenegro, notwithstanding the outcome of the current negotiations on statehood.