

**U.S.-MONTENEGRIN POLICY FORUM**  
**CSIS, Washington, D.C.**  
**September 24, 2002**

The CSIS East European Program hosted a meeting of its U.S.-Montenegrin Policy Forum featuring a leading analyst from Montenegro, Srdjan Darmanovic, director of the Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Podgorica. Mr. Darmanovic assessed the political situation in Montenegro since the signing of the Belgrade Agreement on March 14, 2002. The EU-sponsored Agreement was intended to stabilize relations between Montenegro and Serbia and lay the foundations for a new state. However, the Belgrade Agreement thrust Montenegro into a political crisis that resulted in the collapse of the pro-independence government and enhanced the role of pro-Yugoslav forces. Since that time, political parties in Montenegro have engaged in extensive battles over electoral laws and other legislative issues. Mr. Darmanovic discussed the possible outcomes of the October 20<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections and the impact they will have on Montenegrin society as well as on relations with Serbia. Janusz Bugajski chaired the policy forum. In attendance were members of the Hungarian, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslav diplomatic missions, members of the U.S. administration, representatives of the NGO community, and members of the press.

**Guest Speaker Presentation**

The Belgrade Agreement on new relations between Montenegro and Serbia, signed in March was not a bad deal for Montenegro. But it triggered the immediate collapse of the pro-independence government in Podgorica and a prolonged political crisis. The crisis has not been overcome through standard procedure, such as holding early parliamentary elections. Instead of preparing for elections, political parties have engaged in sharp and protracted battles over the electoral laws. Deep divisions within Montenegrin society and inside the political elite have surfaced even after the Belgrade Agreement temporarily pushed aside the status issue.

The crisis started when the Liberal Alliance (LA), a party that advocated Montenegrin independence, switched sides and instead of supporting Prime Minister Vujanovic's minority government (DPS-SDP), it decided to join parties from the "Together for Yugoslavia" (TFY) coalition, proclaiming as its principal political goal the removal from power of President Milo Djukanovic and his ruling coalition. This occurred after the May 2002 local elections in 19 (out of 21) municipalities on which the Djukanovic coalition gained good results and expected to form local administrations with the LA in the majority of cities. Instead of asking for real power sharing, the LA insisted on gaining mayors in five cities. This was a clear sign that they did not want to continue their political cooperation with the ruling coalition.

When the new "unholy alliance" (TFY-LA) was created, it not only took over five local governments (Niksic, Cetinje, Budva, Tivat, Kotor), but also formed a new parliamentary majority (with only one vote more than the DPS-SDP coalition - 39:38). This new parliamentary majority decided not only to prepare for the next elections, initially

scheduled for 6 October 2002, but also to change some basic elements of the electoral and media laws. This was a clear attack on the theory and practice of democratic legitimacy. A parliament that was technically *dissolved* (decided to shorten its own term for early elections) suddenly engaged in intensive legislative activity. In an effort to change the electoral environment, the new parliamentary majority proposed a number of changes that OSCE experts condemned as either failing to meet European standards or in direct opposition to them. At the same time, the association of the private independent media in Montenegro (UNEM) organized a protest against restrictions on private media in electoral campaigns that were included in the amendment laws proposed by the new parliamentary majority.

During protracted talks under the auspices of the OSCE mission ODIHR experts from Warsaw, the new parliamentary majority (TFY-LA) backtracked from some of their proposals, but succeeded in keeping several alterations, including a decrease in the number of minority (Albanian) representatives in parliament, future control over the state media, changing the structure of central and municipal electoral commissions, and postponing elections for 20 October 2002, after Serbia's presidential elections results are known. At the same time, the TFY-LA coalition is refusing to elect judges to the Constitutional Court not only because the proposed judges were unacceptable to them but because they were proposed by the President of the Republic.

The strategy of the new parliamentary majority (TFY-LA) has been basically oriented to blockade government institutions and avoid elections. Although they could not openly oppose the OSCE's recommendations nor the good will negotiating mission of the US ambassador William Montgomery, the TFY-LA coalition has used every opportunity to propose a postponement or cancellation of elections. As one of their leaders has indicated, the new parliamentary majority seeks to avoid any elections (parliamentary or presidential) until the date of expiration of Djukanovic presidential term (15 Jan 2003), when according to the Montenegrin constitution the speaker of parliament would become an interim head of state if President is not elected by that date.

Assuming that the deadlock will somehow be overcome and elections will take place on 20 October, an opinion poll that CEDEM has just completed indicates a very intensive campaign and a sharp political battle with no real possibility to predict a winner. To win once again President Djukanovic's coalition (DPS-SDP) needs to gain an absolute majority of parliamentary seats, together with the representatives of the Albanian minority. The overall result of the May 2002 local elections for the DPS-SDP coalition was around 45% of votes in 19 municipalities. In the last poll the result is very similar, thus giving a real chance to President Djukanovic's coalition for an absolute majority. The last poll also indicates that their sudden political switch could to some extent cost the Liberals votes. All these factors work in favor of the present government coalition. However, it is still questionable whether DPS-SDP together with the Albanians can gain a majority over the TFY, LA, and the far right coalition (Momir Bulatovic's party with the Radicals) that will pass the threshold. Elections in Montenegro could be decided on the basis of every single vote as it recently happened in the American presidential elections.

What does the electoral outcome mean for Montenegro? If the Djukanovic coalition succeeds in remaining in power it will mean the “politics of continuity.” This has two dimensions. First, it embodies a pro-Western orientation, regardless of the fact that the U.S. and EU pressured Montenegro to abandon its independence drive and make compromises with post-Milosevic Serbia. Second, it embodies a cautious but steady program of economic, legal, and political reforms, especially by adopting reform laws with the participation of Western experts. Continuity also means an orientation toward Montenegrin statehood after three years or so. Time has already shown that the DPS and President Djukanovic are not fundamentalists on this issue but are ready to consider regional priorities and interests. There is little doubt that once the Constitutional Charter of the new Serbia-Montenegro Union is adopted, the Montenegrin side will fulfill its responsibilities. Continuity could also mean slowness in the implementation of reform laws, no clear strategy of economic development, corruption, cronyism, and other problems typical for many post-communist governments. But basically, continuity would mean stability with political figures known to the public and to the international community.

If power is transferred to the TFY-LA coalition, there will be wholesale changes in Montenegrin politics. It would mean a return to power of Serbian nationalism for the first since the mid-1990s. Opinion polls indicate that TFY voters represent conservative and backward strata of society; hence, this coalition will confront difficulties even if it decides to implement real reforms. Moreover, it is unlikely that this coalition can produce a stable government. The glue that keeps together two very different partners (pro-Serbian nationalist parties and one pro-independence party) is the politics of revenge against the current government. In all other program-based issues, the coalition is unstable. Potential instability is confirmed by public perceptions. The vast majority of voters on both sides of the TFY-LA coalition oppose its formation. In the last poll conducted by a Belgrade based polling agency “Strategic Marketing” only 17% of LA voters would support a coalition with TFY, while only 15% of voters for the Socialist People’s Party, (the main party in the coalition) would like to see their party in a political alliance with Liberals.

Whatever the outcome of the political struggle among Montenegrin parties, it is troublesome that after twelve years of regular multiparty elections, almost all institutions in the Republic, including the institution of elections themselves, are facing a deep crisis. Montenegro’s political class, especially one part of it, display a very low level of commitment to democratic procedures. If elections in October 2002 do not produce a clear winner or some inter-party combination that will generate stability, there will need to be major changes in some institutional arrangements. Otherwise, with the country divided over the fundamental issue of Montenegro’s status, any subsequent elections will produce a stalemate rather than a stable government with a strong mandate for reform.

## Discussion

**Forthcoming October Elections:** According to polls, opinions are remaining constant. In order for President Djukanovic to achieve an absolute majority, his party must win one additional seat. Such a vote may come from the radical right wing, which is mainly comprised of dissidents who are aggressive towards the DPS-SDP (Democratic Party of Socialists-Social Democratic Party; Victory for Montenegro Coalition) government. If such an outcome occurs in October, then Montenegro will become politically deadlocked.

**Montenegro's Election Impact on Serbia:** Serbia is large political actor with an important role to play within the Balkans and should not suffer from the October elections in Montenegro. On the surface, it may appear that Together for Yugoslavia (TFY) is a preferable alliance being pro-Milosevic, but many Serbs recognize that if the new alliance wins in the future election it may become an impediment to Serbia's goals of joining international institutions. At this time, the election of a reform-coalition would be preferable to Serbia.

**Together for Yugoslavia (TFY) Victory:** If TFY wins the elections, it would be a victory for all who support the strengthening of federalism within Montenegro. If TFY is elected, then minorities in Montenegro may be adversely affected because TFY is a 100% Orthodox party intolerant of minorities. Further exacerbating the minority issue is that the Albanians in Montenegro have already been deprived one seat in parliament and a TFY victory may represent a further erosion of minority rights.

**Liberal Alliance:** It is unlikely that the Liberal Alliance would disappear from the next elections because its hard-core supporters. However, of its supporters 20% have indicated through polling that they may vote for another party during the October elections or abstain entirely from voting. If 20% of the Liberal Alliance's supporters vote for another party the beneficiary may be Djukanovic. Finally, if 20% of the Liberal Alliance's supporters change parties or abstain from voting then the party's total share of parliamentary seats would decrease from 8% to 6.5%. The possibility of receiving less voter support in October increases the chances of Djukanovic to obtain the necessary votes in order to achieve absolute majority.

**Kosova:** Kosova's political elite will never accept any union with Serbia or Montenegro. Should the international community keep Kosova in a framework with Serbia, Kosova will result in a Cyprus-model and Kosova will require international presence for an indefinite period of time.

**E.U.-U.S.-Montenegrin Relations:** The EU did not directly intervene during the recent political crisis in Montenegro but the OSCE did make a statement and attempted to find a solution to the crisis. On the other hand, Ambassador William D. Montgomery, chief of the U.S. Mission to Yugoslavia in Belgrade, replied directly to President Djukanovic's proposal for an international response. There is a perception within Montenegro that the U.S. can deliver solutions to internal problems where the European Union has been

unable to do so. Therefore, Montenegro is dependent upon governmental and non-governmental aid from the United States. There are other issues for the European Union to deal with in the Balkans, leaving the U.S., OSCE and the Council of Europe to address concerns within Montenegro.

**Constitutional Charter:** The final issue impeding the conclusion of the negotiations for the Constitutional Charter is the election of deputies to the common Serbian-Montenegrin parliament. The Montenegrin government, based on confederation rules, wants to elect its deputies (meaning an indirect election of deputies) to send to the common parliament. Serbia, on the other hand, prefers a direct election system, which according to the Copenhagen Agreement is the only way a parliament can be formed, where one chamber must be directly elected. Behind these principles rests Djukanovic's strong commitment not to repeat the error made during Milosevic's rule: Djukanovic does not want to be a minority player in Belgrade. This is a legitimate political goal.