



Center for Strategic & International Studies
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U.S.-MONTENEGRIN POLICY FORUM

Montenegro on the Eve of Independence Referendum

with

Director of the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM)

Srdjan Darmanovic

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On May 8, 2006 the New European Democracies Project at CSIS held a roundtable from the **U.S.-Montenegrin Policy Forum** series focusing on the run up to the May 21st Montenegrin referendum on restoring independence and statehood.

Ahead of the national ballot, guest speaker **Srdjan Darmanovic**, Director of the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM), examined the key political and social factors that will help determine the outcome of the upcoming vote and reviewed the challenges faced by Podgorica both before and after the referendum. CEDEM is an independent think tank in Montenegro, which seeks to contribute to the strengthening of civil society and consolidation of democracy in the republic. CEDEM often conducts opinion polls on the issue of statehood and Dr. Darmanovic presented his observations on public attitudes and expectations regarding Montenegro's future.

Summary of Dr. Darmanovic's presentation

Legal conditions for the referendum

Referendum in Montenegro will be held under unique and unprecedented legal conditions.

Model of majority (55% majority of those who vote), formally accepted by both sides in Montenegro, but essentially imposed through heavy pressure from EU officials.

Technical conditions for the forthcoming referendum are more or less non-problematic. Voting register is open and updated while electoral administration is pretty well developed.

Political camps in referendum

Independents - *multiethnic coalition* consisting of: governing parties (DPS, SDP, CP), pro-Montenegrin opposition parties (LP – successor party of former LA), Albanian minority parties (DUA, DA), Croatian minority parties from the coastal region, shelter civic movement (“Movement for Independent European Montenegro”).

Unionists – mostly *Orthodox coalition* consisting of: the strongest opposition party (SNP) portraying itself as



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non-nationalist, pro-Serb nationalist opposition parties (SNS, NS, DSS), shelter civic movement ("Movement for European State Union Serbia and Montenegro"), small parties/groups of Bosniak/Muslims without relevance in Montenegrin politics.

Referendum campaign

Extraordinary composure so far in political campaigning and advertising. Less dramatic than many of former key parliamentary (1998, 2001, 2002) or presidential elections (especially those of 1997). There are some routine attacks on the opponents, but mostly without hate speech, threats or indicating potential for post-referendum instability.

Campaign of the **independents** mostly based on: a) door to door campaign; b) just few (5-6) big rallies in the most important cities; c) intense advertising in electronic media and through billboards in the cities; d) debates with the opponents and talk-shows in the electronic media; e) using some advantages of the incumbents typical for any elections all over the world.

Campaign of the **unionists** mostly based on: a) very large number of rallies with the supporters in all Montenegrin cities, suburban areas and countryside; b) door to door campaign; c) intense advertising in electronic and printed media; d) debates with the opponents and talk-shows in the electronic media; e) support of government and sister-parties from Serbia.

There is an impression independents camp is conducting somewhat more successful and more efficient campaign, maybe because of the fact that it's easier to campaign "for" than "against" your country. For that and maybe other reasons, campaign of independents is rather *positively* oriented, emphasizing advantages of independence, and calling for unity of all Montenegrin citizens no matter how they vote in referendum, while campaign of unionists is rather *negatively* oriented, denying independence through targeting "regime" in Montenegro and especially focused on one man, PM Djukanovic.

Result predictions

During the last week of April, two prominent polling agencies in Montenegro – CEDEM and "Damar" – conducted separate polls with different methodologies and different samples, but obtained very similar results. CEDEM – 56,3% for independence and 43,7% pro-union, while "Damar" – 55,9% for independence and 44,1% pro-union. (Slides about CEDEM April 2006 poll).

Even the most professionally done and reliable opinion polls have to account for a possible margin error of 2%. As a result, the CEDEM and Damar's results are not conclusive predictions of the independents' victory, but at least they indicate an increase in support for independence.

Possible outcomes

Of three theoretically possible outcomes – a) over 55% majority for independence; b) over 50% but less than 55% majority for independence (so called "gray zone"); c) over 50% majority for the unionists. Only the first two options seem realistic at this point. The third scenario is very unlikely, according to all electoral results (parliamentary, presidential, municipal) from 1998 onward, and according to all polls conducted since 2001.

Situation will become very clear in case of the first possible outcome - over 55% majority for independence. Montenegro will quickly be recognized as independent country of all interested actors: EU, USA, Serbia, pro-unionist opposition and the rest of world. Talks about the succession of the former State Union S&M will be partly eased by the



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fact that Serbia will, according to the Belgrade Agreement and Constitutional Charter of S&M, immediately become a successor state in the UN and other international organizations, while talks on other relevant things for the relations between two countries will be released by just finished referendum campaign and will be conducted by two rational sides – democratically elected government of Montenegro and Serbia. Prospects for the future relations between Montenegro and Serbia seem to be very good. Role of EU and USA crucial in the next phase for Montenegro's future, regarding achieving standards Montenegro to become member of PfP and subsequently NATO, as well as for the SAA process and EU integration.

Situation will be substantially different in case number two – “gray zone”. *Legally* – Montenegro will not become independent and internationally recognized. *Politically* – S&M Union will be de-legitimized by majority of Montenegrin voters (especially if that majority is close to 55%). In this case relations between Montenegrin government and EU administration in Brussels will become critical. These two actors will have to be very inventive in searching for the solution for the unclear situation. Approach of the Serbian government to this situation will also be important.

Potential temporary solution in this case could be: a) further weakening of the S&M Union by erasing elective organs (Parliament of the Union, Council of Ministers) and keeping just coordinative organs - model similar to Scandinavian integrative bodies (Nordic Council or so); b) waiting for new referendum in three years as it is fixed by the Montenegrin referendum law, under the auspices of EU. (Slides 6-7).

“Gray zone” is a non-desirable solution for either of three main actors: a) for Montenegro, it means protracted transition, burdened by status issue for more three years; b) for Serbia, it means to stay trapped in dysfunctional union without definition of its status; c) for EU, it means dealing another three years with even weaker and even less relevant Union than in last three years, what will not contribute in strengthening SAA process for either countries.

Security aspect.

No prospects for any violence over referendum. Reasons: 1) Serbian government supports unionist camp politically and probably financially, but Belgrade won't follow tragic example from the nineties in this case; 2) No relevant political party in Montenegro advocates violence as an outcome of the referendum or takes that option seriously; 3) Military is under process of reduction and reform – and far from any adventurism of nineties; all important military appointments in Montenegrin territory in last five years were approved by Montenegrin government.

In case independents win, tactics of denying referendum result from the unionist camp by producing number of cases of irregularities in the polling stations, is possible. But, as long as OSCE and EU declare result regular, legal, definite and acceptable, at least the biggest opposition party (SNP) if not all others, will follow this example.

EU role in the process.

EU will take *all the glory* in scenario No. 1 – independence of Montenegro with more than 55% of the votes. HC Solana and Slovak ambassador Lajcak (Solana's personal envoy in negotiations between two sides in Montenegro on referendum conditions) will go directly to Montenegrin history as those who give strong political legitimacy to the whole process, who brought both sides to participate and accept results, who actually overbridged a century long principal division in Montenegrin politics.

In the scenario No. 2 – “gray zone” - EU will take *responsibility* for making one not so complicated situation much more complicated, by inventing and imposing strange 55:45 model. “Solanization” or “lajcakization” will



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become synonymous for instigating institutional crisis in one country without real reason to do it.

In both of the scenarios, in different ways, EU will stay key foreign policy player in Montenegrin affairs in the next period.

Q&A session:

Can we expect irregularities in the voting process?

People don't expect irregularities in the process. The process is too much under the supervision of the EU and the OSCE.

Corruption in the current government is a problem for the people. Is there a third option?

Parliamentary elections will be held in September, so people can decide at that time whether they want a new government or a reshaped political platform. If the referendum results in independence, the present government will most likely remain in power.

How important is the question of voter turnout? How much volatility is there in the situation?

About 13 percent have stated that they will abstain from the elections. This percentage is almost fixed: these people live abroad, are illiterate or they never went to vote. It is certain that the turnout will not go over 90 percent.

How significant is the issue of capturing Mladic?

Pro-Unionist electorate does not understand the importance of the delivery of Mladic. They strongly oppose the U.S. and NATO, but support the EU.

If independence succeeds how will the political situation change?

Every political faction will accept the result. There is one common point for the political parties: EU membership and to achieve progress in SAA negotiations.

Is 55:45 percent model setting a precedent for the future referendums? Are these requirements unique for Montenegro and thus will never be seen again?

The 55 threshold sets a precedent and it will be difficult to achieve, but that is mainly the reason the EU imposed this requirement. I do not believe that it will be repeated in other referendums.

If 55 is passed, any changes in the enrollment of Montenegrin students in Serbian universities or any impact in the free movement of goods?

The close ties with Serbia especially in healthcare and education are essential for Montenegrins. Property owned by Serbs in Montenegro won't be confiscated and talks for EU accession will be together with Serbia, benefiting both sides. I believe that Serbia and Montenegro will have better ties after the status issues are resolved.

Economy of Montenegro once achieved independence?

I am not the best person to talk to about economics, but Montenegro has resources and it has proven to be very successful in the service sector. There is little interdependence between the economies of Serbia and Montenegro,



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which use different currencies. The economy will probably benefit from settling the final status issue, because this will boost investor confidence.

Will independence for Montenegro make it difficult to resolve the status of Kosova?
Kosovo issue is between Belgrade, Brussels and Washington. Montenegro is not involved in the process and the two status questions should be viewed independently.