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**PARLIAMENTARY AND
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
IN MONTENEGRO**



**A Report Prepared by the Staff of
the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki process, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. Since then, its membership has expanded to 55, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. (The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, has been suspended since 1992, leaving the number of countries fully participating at 54.) As of January 1, 1995, the formal name of the Helsinki process was changed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

The OSCE has its main office in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations and periodic consultations among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government are held.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION (CSCE)

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the agreements of the OSCE.

The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff of approximately 15 persons assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

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MAP OF SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

SUMMARY

On May 31, 1998, Montenegro held elections for the 78 seats in the republic's parliament as well as for seats in the local councils of its 21 municipalities. These elections took place in a political environment marked by tension between Montenegro and Serbia, the only two of the six former Yugoslav republics which have established a new federal relationship. At issue was whether the Serbia-dominated federation created in 1992 and controlled by the authoritarian Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic would permit Montenegro to develop economically and politically on its own and, if not, whether Montenegro would make its own move toward outright independence. Milosevic seems unwilling to concede Montenegro's *de jure* autonomy within the federation and would likely resort to some use of force to maintain control over what is, in fact, Serbia's only access to the sea.

Moreover, Montenegro's relationship with Serbia is a divisive issue internally, pitting those ethnic Montenegrins with pro-Serb inclinations, especially in the north, against those who stress the republic's distinctness from Serbia and are supported in their position by the sizable Bosniac (Muslim) and Albanian communities. Those favoring a close relationship with Serbia rallied around former Montenegrin President and current Yugoslav Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic, while those advocating a more independent course strongly supported the current President, Milo Djukanovic. Both came to power under the auspices of the former Communist party, now called the Democratic Party of Socialists, but Djukanovic was able to wrestle control of the party and oust his one-time mentor Bulatovic in presidential elections in 1997. Differences have been so strong in Montenegro in support of one or the other since that time that many predicted the parliamentary elections would be accompanied by civil violence.

The elections were carried out in a relatively free and fair manner. The campaign period was marked by openness to differing points of view and a growing independent media. The elections were organized in a manner that was easily understood by the voters, giving them a choice among 17 political parties to be represented proportionally in the new parliament and a similar choice among a lesser number of parties for proportional representation in municipal councils. Officials from the republic level down to the polling committees administered the elections professionally, with sufficient transparency for all political parties to uncover any attempt at major fraud.

The results of the elections were clearer than anticipated, with the election coalition surrounding Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists winning 42 of the 78 seats compared to Bulatovic's Socialist People's Party, which won 29 seats. Two Albanian parties each won a seat, and the Liberal Alliance, which prior to last year's split within the Democratic Party of Socialists had been the leading opposition party, won five seats. The Djukanovic election coalition would likely have had the support of these parties in forming a government coalition, but the results made that unnecessary. On the local level, Djukanovic's coalition won in two-thirds of the municipalities and Bulatovic's party in the remaining one-third except one in which the ethnically Albanian-based political parties share power.

Proper election conduct and decisive results combined to deter an immediate effort by Yugoslav and Serbian officials to challenge the outcome, especially given the Yugoslav military's

hesitation to be used to impose Yugoslav control over Montenegro's internal development and the preoccupation with the conflict in neighboring Kosovo, which has been growing in intensity. In the longer term, however, it is improbable that, within a federation, one republic can engage in democratization and market reform while the other stagnates under a corrupt authoritarianism that is half Communist, half nationalist. It is not impossible for Djukanovic, given his own background, to find a working relationship with Milosevic, but that is unlikely, as are the prospects for Serbia to adopt Montenegro's reformist course in the near future. Thus, a confrontation within the new Yugoslav federation remains a definite possibility, and Montenegro, while receiving significant political support from the international community, must tread carefully in challenging the authority of the much larger and more powerful neighbor with which it is federated.

BACKGROUND

Montenegro is located on the southeast Adriatic coast in South-Central Europe, bordering Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to the northwest, Serbia along with Kosovo to the northeast, and Albania to the southeast. The republic was one of six in the former Yugoslavia and, in April 1992, was the only one to join Serbia to form a new Yugoslav federation.¹ The *de facto* Montenegrin capital is Podgorica—Titograd in the Communist period —although nearby Cetinje is the historic and constitutionally-designated capital of the republic.

Montenegro is dominated by high mountains, especially in the interior, sustaining only about 630,000 people. Indeed, while its territory represents almost 14 percent that of the Federation, its population constitutes only half that share. Though small, Montenegro's population is ethnically diverse. In 1991, under 62 percent considered themselves to be ethnically Montenegrin. Like Serbs, Montenegrins are predominantly of Eastern Orthodox faith or cultural background and speak the same South Slavic language. Actual differences—based mostly on history, geography and the influences both have on culture—are blurred, and almost 10 percent of the population consider themselves actually to be ethnic Serbs, especially in the north. Almost 15 percent of the population are Bosniacs, also speakers of the language shared by Montenegrins and Serbs but of the Islamic faith or cultural background. Most Bosniacs also live in the north of Montenegro in a region which extends equally into neighboring Serbia and is known as the Sandzak, with the Serbian city of Novi Pazar as its principal center.² Ethnic Albanians comprise almost 7 percent of the population, concentrated along the southern Montenegrin coastline around Ulcinj and inland around Plav. The remaining population consists of a small Croat community, Roma and persons of mixed nationality

¹ The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) existed from the end of World War II until the end of 1991, when it effectively disintegrated and four of its six republics, along with Kosovo of the two autonomous provinces within Serbia, asserted independent statehood. As the conflict in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina erupted in April 1992, Serbia and Montenegro proclaimed a new federation, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which was slow to win international recognition and continues not to be formally recognized by the United States. Its claim as the sole successor of the previous federation has also found virtually no international support.

² In the former Yugoslavia, "Muslim" was used as an ethnic term for those South Slavs, located primarily in Bosnia-Herzegovina but extending through the Sandzak into Kosovo, of Islamic faith or tradition. With the dissolution of the old Yugoslav federation, this population has increasingly identified itself as "Bosniac," even outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The term has a distinct ethnic meaning, differing from "Bosnian" which can refer to anyone from Bosnia-Herzegovina in a civic or territorial sense. As far as the common language, Serbs, Croats, Bosniacs and Montenegrins were said in the former Yugoslavia to have spoken the same Serbo-Croatian language, but Yugoslavia's demise has led its native speakers to claim they have three, possibly four, distinct yet mutually intelligible languages.

who consider themselves to be “Yugoslavs.” At the height of the conflict in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, about 60,000 refugees—equal almost to 10 percent of the population—were in Montenegro, and they included both Bosnian Serbs and Bosniacs.

Leading up to Yugoslavia’s violent disintegration, Montenegro’s traditional affinities with Serbia were bolstered by an “anti-bureaucratic revolution” in 1989 engineered by then Serbian President Milosevic’s regime. The new Montenegrin Communist leaders, who renamed their party the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), maintained their power in multiparty elections held in the republic in 1990, 1992 and 1996, and sided with Milosevic in the political maneuvering which preceded the conflict in 1991. When conflict did break out in late June of that year, many Montenegrins genuinely embraced the extreme nationalist fervor of their Serb brethren, participating in the siege of Dubrovnik and, a year later, the brutal ethnic cleansing campaign in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina. Many others, of course, opposed being associated with this aggressive behavior but saw little chance that Montenegro could successfully distance itself from Serbia. In fact, the majority of Montenegro’s voters chose to remain affiliated with Serbia in a new federation in a strangely worded referendum in early 1992.³ The ethnic minorities in Montenegro, of course, opposed the new nationalist policies emanating from Podgorica, and they—especially the Bosniacs of the Sandzak—became internal victims of these policies through increased discrimination and harassment. The imposition of strong economic and political sanctions on the Serbian-Montenegrin federation caused Montenegro occasionally to distance itself from Belgrade’s policies, but as the international community seemed unwilling to halt Bosnia’s destruction, Podgorica usually fell back into line. Ultimately, Montenegro proclaimed its own sovereignty with its constitution while it acquiesced or supported violations of the sovereignty of other former Yugoslav republics.

Things changed, however, with the signing of the Dayton Agreement in December 1995. The end of the Bosnian conflict permitted Montenegro to more boldly assert its own interests, and the government of Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic did just that. In particular, Djukanovic sought exemption from those few but important international sanctions—the so-called “outer wall”—which remained in place, and he expressed a surprising degree of criticism of the Serbian regime as he did. Montenegrin television also became sufficiently critical of the Serbian regime in 1996 that it ceased to be rebroadcast on Serbian television.. Belgrade also responded by placing Montenegro’s two airports under federal control and hinting of constitutional changes which would dilute republican authority. In turn, as Milosevic moved from the Serbian to the Yugoslav Presidency in June and July 1997, Djukanovic openly split with the Milosevic-supported Montenegrin President, Momir Bulatovic, and made clear, through the Montenegrin deputies to the Yugoslav Parliament, opposition to federal constitutional changes that would permit the Yugoslav President to be elected directly.⁴ Of course, while Montenegro’s interests defined the basis for the split, it was the inability of

³ In contrast to referenda elsewhere, in Montenegro a “yes” vote signaled support for remaining part of the federation, not for proclaiming independence. Another Montenegrin oddity was the 1991 proclamation of the republic as an “Ecological State.”

⁴ While Milosevic was President of Serbia, the Yugoslav Presidency was largely a ceremonial post. His move to the federal level was caused by a two-term limit in the Serbian post. A popularly elected Yugoslav President would be easy for Milosevic to win, given his political control in much larger Serbia, and would enable him to transfer power from the Serbian Presidency with greater ease. It would also give him a mandate to intervene more forcefully in Montenegro. Montenegro, in turn, holds an equal number of seats in the upper chamber of the Yugoslav Parliament, and has used that situation as a bulwark against Serbian efforts to whittle away at the republic’s constitutionally declared sovereignty.

the two men to share political power which motivated the move of the younger Djukanovic against his mentor. Bulatovic was technically ousted from the party, but the reality was that the party had split in two. Both claimed to represent the real Democratic Party of Socialists.

The Montenegrin Parliament called for a special presidential election on October 5, 1997, the purpose of which was to remove Bulatovic from political power. At first, Bulatovic was blocked from even competing—on grounds that two candidates could not run from the same party—but Montenegrin officials decided not to challenge Yugoslav court decisions in support of the besieged president. In a sufficiently open contest between eight candidates, Bulatovic very narrowly defeated Djukanovic but did not obtain a majority of the votes cast, forcing a second round between the two. Corrections to faulty voter registration lists and a stronger turnout from those segments of society more apt to support Djukanovic produced a narrow but definite victory for Djukanovic two weeks later. This victory was in large part due to support from most opposition parties, which Djukanovic obtained by agreeing to principles for the development of a democratic infrastructure in Montenegro. The fomenting of ethnic tensions and some violence within the republic during the election period and at the time of presidential inauguration in January 1998 failed to prevent Djukanovic from taking office. The next chance for Bulatovic, and ultimately for Milosevic in Montenegro, would be the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 31, 1998.⁵

THE ELECTION CONTEST

The election itself was relatively straightforward. In the Montenegrin Assembly, 78 seats were contested in a proportional-based election in which voters throughout the republic, with identical ballots, would select the political party they support.⁶ Seats would then be divided accordingly among those parties winning at least 3 percent of the vote. While proportional-based representation downplays the connections between parliamentarians and a particular constituency or region, problems associated with the defining of electoral districts are eliminated. Proportional-based representation can also provide smaller parties, if they are not regionally based, with their best chance to gain representation in the parliament, especially if the requisite threshold percentage is low. A special arrangement was made to designate five seats for representation of the highly-concentrated Albanian community in Montenegro.

Within Montenegro, there are 21 municipalities of various sizes and populations which have their own local governments. The elections for seats on the municipal councils were also fairly straightforward, the only real difference being that voters in different municipalities obviously had different ballots. The size of the councils varied according to population, but each had at least 30 seats.

Seventeen political parties or coalitions of parties participated in the parliamentary elections. Many, however, were inconsequential. The real race was, like the presidential elections,

⁵ The last parliamentary elections in Montenegro were held in November 1996 for a four-year term of office, but the Montenegrin Government called new elections in March 1998 in order to marginalize the Bulatovic faction of the DPS further and to honor the agreement with Djukanovic-supporting opposition parties that wanted new parliamentary elections in 1998.

⁶ The Assembly elected in 1996 had only 71 seats. The number of seats is determined by the size of the population, with one seat allocated for every 6,000 persons. An updated census, therefore, indicated the need for an additional seven seats.

between Milo Djukanovic and his forces on the one hand, and Momir Bulatovic and his forces on the other. Of secondary interest was the question of how well parties representing the Albanian and Bosniac communities would fare, along with the larger opposition parties not in formal coalition with Djukanovic.

By the election period, Djukanovic had effective control of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), the Bulatovic faction having formally founded a new political party. The successor to the former League of Communists of Montenegro, the DPS has an extensive base throughout the republic still largely intact, even though the party platform endorsed increasingly democratic and market-reform principles.

While controlling the largest single political party in his own right, however, Djukanovic chose to form an election coalition in order to avoid splitting votes between like-minded parties to the benefit of Bulatovic. Two other parties, the Peoples' Party of Montenegro and the Social Democratic Party, joined the coalition designed "For a Better Life."⁷ The People's Party, led by Professor Novak Kilibarda, has traditionally advocated a pro-Serb line but affiliated itself in recent years with pro-democracy parties despite their stress on Montenegro's distinctness from Serbia. As one of the larger opposition parties, it was viewed as standing the best chance of making inroads among those loyal to Bulatovic, even though a split within the party led to the departure of many pro-Serb members. The Social Democratic Party, chaired by Zarko Rakicevic, was founded only in 1993 but has deeper roots in the Alliance of Reformed Forces founded in 1990 by then-Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic as an alternative to nationalist parties in the Yugoslav republics. Its platform is along traditional social democratic lines and opposes Montenegro's federal relationship with Serbia based on a questionable 1992 referendum.

The leading challenger to the three-party coalition was the new political party formed by Momir Bulatovic, called the Socialist People's Party. The new party was formed in March 1998 but had already developed a strong network throughout the republic based on the Democratic Party of Socialists from which it sprung. Moreover, the Socialist People's Party is known to have received significant financial assistance from Belgrade, since the party advocated a strongly pro-Milosevic and pro-Yugoslav line. The party participated in the elections from beginning to end, although it at times threatened to boycott.

The only other political party with a republic-wide following was the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro, led by Slavko Perovic. Prior to the split within the Democratic Party of Socialists, the Liberal Alliance was the leading opposition party in Montenegro, and the Liberals had been in alliance with the People's Party during the 1996 parliamentary elections. Ironically, the Liberal Alliance's platform has been the most aggressive in advocating Montenegrin independence, in contrast to the People's Party's pro-Serb leanings. Nevertheless, the advocacy of democratic development in Montenegro overshadowed differences regarding the republic's relationship with Belgrade. Like the Socialist People's Party, the Liberal Alliance at times threatened to boycott the elections, perhaps with the goal of obtaining some concessions from the ruling party.

⁷ "Da Zivimo Bolje"

A few parties were based on their advocacy of the interests of either the Bosniac or the Albanian communities in Montenegro. The leading Bosniac party has traditionally been the Party of Democratic Action of Montenegro, an affiliate of the ruling Bosniac party in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina and closely linked to its counterpart in Serbia.⁸ The party had been torn between nationalist and moderate factions but has since evolved into a party that does not support autonomy as much as integration. As a result, the party has generally been supportive of the Democratic Party of Socialists since the Djukanovic takeover. In the end, the Party of Democratic Action all but formally withdrew from the race, calling for support for the coalition. There also was an Association of Bosniacs-Muslims which participated in the elections but was inconsequential.

Two political parties claim to represent the interests of the Albanian community of Montenegro. The Democratic League of Albanians in Montenegro, founded in 1990, and the Democratic Union of Albanians which was founded in 1993 as a result of a split within the Democratic League. The two parties have few real differences in their programs and have supported the reforms of Djukanovic. Both also have significant support from the Albanian population.

Most of the other political parties competing in the elections were of little consequence. Several were essentially Serb nationalist parties, while others represented more traditional Communist views or other ideologies that were not currently mainstream in Montenegrin society. The Montenegrin branch of the Belgrade-based Party of the Yugoslav Left formally withdrew from the elections, deciding to throw all of its support behind Bulatovic's party.

The campaign period was very tense at times, but there were no major incidents nor restrictions on campaign activities. Posters from all the major political parties were plastered everywhere, and all were able to hold rallies throughout the republic. A bomb threat was made during the final rally of the Democratic Party of Socialists, and, when a firecracker went off during that rally, some people were injured in the ensuing panic.

Bulatovic's support has traditionally been stronger in the north, where Montenegrins tend to have more pro-Serb leaning and where the highly pro-Bulatovic Serbian media may have greater effect, although the Bosniacs who also inhabit the region rallied strongly for Djukanovic. In the south, Djukanovic faced little challenge from the Liberal Alliance, and Albanians like the Bosniacs saw their interests reflected at the republic level by Djukanovic. Local races, of course, may have shown some variance, with the Albanian political parties particularly seeking seats in key municipalities.

On May 20, in a controversial procedure, Yugoslav President Milosevic appointed Momir Bulatovic as the new Federal Prime Minister, seemingly raising the stakes in the elections tremendously. The move was perceived as an effort to increase the image of Bulatovic quantitatively and qualitatively, and intimidate voters into believing that federal authorities might intervene in the elections.

Montenegrin media coverage of the campaign was reasonably good, with several independent outlets for both broadcast and print media, some well established. In addition, while it was

⁸ The Party for Democratic Action in both Montenegro and Serbia is based in the Sandzak region which straddles the border between the two republics.

viewed as destabilizing, the Serbian media did participate in the campaign with pro-Bulatovic reporting, without any legal obligation to demonstrate objectivity. Readership of Serbian newspapers is known to have declined at the time of the elections.⁹ There are several independent television and radio stations with republic-wide coverage, as well as widely read independent dailies, such as the new *Vijesti* and weeklies like *Monitor*. As the media situation has improved since the Djukanovic-Bulatovic split in 1997, more Montenegrins are believed to trust and rely on state-run television, radio and the newspaper *Pobjeda* for news. Legal requirements for election coverage, however, compelled editors temporarily to exclude popular columns from POBJEDA, and state television had to buy additional cameras to cover all of the events. While election coverage was extensive, it was not very analytical, which meant that the welcomed minimizing of media bias was nevertheless to the detriment of programs which were genuinely interesting and informative..

ELECTION DAY

For the 1998 parliamentary elections, 449,835 Montenegrin citizens were registered to vote. Over one-fourth of the voting population resides in Podgorica municipality alone. Over 60 percent of the registered voters live in the southern half of the republic, including Podgorica as well as the second largest city, Niksic. The population drops significantly in the rugged regions of central Montenegro, but the northern four municipalities—Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, Berane and Rozaje—each have considerable voting populations, together constituting another quarter of the total for the republic.

The registration of voters was surrounded by controversy since the very close of the October 1997 presidential election, in which the addition of almost 8,000 voters to the registration lists between the two rounds may have helped turn Djukanovic's trailing by 2,267 votes to a victory by 5,488 votes in the second round. While other factors, including a higher voter turnout, played a role in this turnaround, both Djukanovic and Bulatovic claimed the list which had given them the most votes was the most accurate. International observers noted major shortcomings in the lists for the first round and called for updating the lists to the extent possible by the second round two weeks later, but they also expressed concern that changing the lists within the same election was itself problematic and should be avoided in the future.

In February 1998, the Montenegrin Assembly passed a new Law on the Registers of Electors which sought to clarify citizen eligibility to vote and improve the maintenance of the lists. Still, approximately 32,000 voters were on the list as required by Montenegrin courts but were declared ineligible to vote on election day. The reason for their ineligibility was their lack of an identification number, which was key to an accurate match of the person seeking to vote and the name on the list. While this development was viewed as unfortunate, election officials argued that voters were given the opportunity to correct the lists and that most of the names without identification numbers were duplicates or the names of persons who had died or left the republic. In addition, during the verification and appeals process more than 60,000 names without identification numbers were corrected either through the proper adding of the number to the lists or the deletion of the names based

⁹ International Foundation for Election Systems, "Serbia and Montenegro: Poll Worker Training and Voter Awareness Assessment," *Legal Review*, July 1997-February 1998, p. 49.

on proof that the person was no longer an eligible voter.

There were about 950 polling stations throughout Montenegro, averaging the number of voters per station to less than 500, a very manageable number. Of course, the number of voters per station varied, with extremely rural stations having relatively few voters and those in urban areas larger numbers. However, an effort was made to keep practically all stations limited to no more than about 1,000 voters, although legally the number registered at a station could go as high as 2,000. This was a marked improvement over the October 1997 presidential elections, for which there was some overcrowding due to approximately 75 fewer polling stations and a less deliberate allocation of voters to each polling station.

Overseeing the polling stations were municipal election commissions, of which there were twenty-one. The number of voters within each municipality, unlike those assigned to each polling station, varied enormously, from 116,620 in Podgorica municipality to 2,829 in Savnik municipality. As the elections were based on a proportional race, with the entire republic serving as a single district, the disparity in municipality sizes did not mean over-representation for some citizens and under-representation for others. The municipal election commissions reported to the Republic Election Commission. Both the republic and municipal commissions have as permanent members lawyers who serve 4-year terms. Membership on these commissions is expanded 15 days before the elections to include representatives of political parties and coalitions fielding candidates. Their representatives are also permitted to join polling station committees as well.

Foreign observation of the elections was welcomed at all levels. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) deployed an observation mission consisting of 10 staff members based in Podgorica, as well as 11 long-term observers and 80 short-term observers deployed throughout the republic. Javier Ruperez, a Spanish parliamentarian and then-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was designated as the Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office and hence the leader of the observation effort, while a Norwegian official, Kare Vollan, was designated to head the actual OSCE Mission. Twenty-two European parliamentarians and 15 persons from foreign embassies in Belgrade or from international organizations also participated in the observation effort. On election day, these observers were able to cover 65 percent of the polling stations. In addition, in contrast to Serbia and some other countries in the region, Montenegrin authorities were very open to observation by domestic civic organizations, and the Montenegrin Helsinki Committee, among others, was permitted to deploy non-partisan domestic observers without any hindrance.

Polling stations opened at 7:00 a.m. on May 31 and remained open until 8:00 p.m. that evening. Most observers reported that the stations opened on time and were prepared to process voters. The first voter also participated in the sealing of the ballot box by first certifying that the box was empty. Subsequent voting went fairly smoothly. Some stations were subjected to long lines of prospective voters but this was no serious impediment to the voting process. The polling stations themselves were usually adequate to handle the crowds, and a polling committee member usually was at the door to ensure that the station itself would not become swamped with people which could jeopardize the integrity of the voting process. Police were sometimes present at polling stations, but their presence was an indication of a secure environment for voting and not intimidation.

Most polling committees processed the voters properly. In many cases, most of the work

was done by those committee members selected to serve on the committees and not by the party representatives. This likely precluded some possible fraud at the polling station, and, although the party representatives had the right to participate fully, most seemed content simply to observe the proceedings. Polling stations had standard ballot boxes, as well as dividers to ensure privacy of voting, issued to them. So-called “family voting” was widely observed, but this tradition, while not a good practice, nevertheless did not indicate any premeditated effort to manipulate the elections or deny any eligible person their right to vote in privacy if they wished to do so. There were also some instances of open voting, but, as with family voting, it simply was the choice of the voter not to go into a voting booth at a time when the polling committee was too preoccupied with processing voters to correct the situation. Blind or illiterate voters could choose someone to assist them in the voting booth, and the hospitalized or disabled could request by 12:00 noon on election day that a “mobile box” be brought to them by a polling committee team so that they could vote. Montenegrins in the military were granted 2-days leave in order to return home to vote in the elections.

Many observers visited polling stations where persons were denied permission to vote, and occasionally witnessed the denial. Often, the persons in question were not on the voter registration list for that polling station, and it was possible that they were listed elsewhere. Other times, there was missing or inaccurate information on the list. Some observers noted that the polling committee members would enforce the rules so strictly that even a very minor discrepancy would deny a person the ability to vote. In very few cases, did the opposite happen, when those without identification numbers were wrongly given a ballot.

During the course of the balloting, the Republic Election Commission decided that polling station committees should be more flexible and instructed them to allow people to vote if the identification numbers listed were a relatively close match. This had the benefit of allowing those who in all likelihood had the right to vote the opportunity to do so. However, the mid-course decision also meant that those potential voters who earlier were turned away were not treated equally, and some polling station committees tried to contact these persons so that they could come back to vote. While the decision was a logical one, it clearly should have been taken before election day.

The simplicity of the election permitted a relatively easy counting process. There were only the two races—for the Assembly and for the municipal council—to be counted, and no polling stations had extremely large numbers of voters. The rules for counting, moreover, were straightforward, and polling committees seemed intent on following them. Foreign observers usually were able to follow the polling committee members as they delivered the results and the ballots to the municipal election commissions. The results reported by observers matched those given officially in all 63 stations where the counting was observed. Only in one station did the number of ballots exceed the number of people checked off the list as having voted. In that case, the election was repeated three days later. The party and coalition representatives on the polling committees remained cooperative whether or not the results at that particular polling station were in their favor, and there were few disputes over the invalidity of incorrectly marked ballots. The tabulation of the results was also transparent, and the results were announced quickly.

Election day concluded with no major incidents, despite the potential for provoking violence as a way to de-legitimize the results. Late in the day, police had decided to block traffic on the street where the Socialist People’s Party of Momir Bulatovic is located and where its supporters

were gathering, but, after a little more than one hour, the situation returned to normal without any violent incident. The authorities claimed they had heard reports that the party followers might engage in public disorder to set the stage for a possible decision not to recognize the results. Early the next morning gunfire erupted in Podgorica, but it soon became clear that the shots were in celebration of the Djukanovic victory and not of a confrontation turned violent.

RESULTS

The results reflected a strong victory for the coalition led by Milo Djukanovic and a major blow to Momir Bulatovic's attempt to regain control of Montenegro through elections. Turnout was a strong 75 percent,¹⁰ demonstrating that the voting population had confidence that the election process would reflect their desires. The "For a Better Life" coalition received 49.5 percent of the vote compared to 36.1 percent for the Socialist People's Party. The Liberal Alliance won 6.3 percent of the vote—about the same as it did in previous elections. No other party reached the 3 percent threshold, although the Albanian political parties received seats due to the legal guarantee of seats for the Albanian community.

The results produced the following representation in the Montenegrin Assembly:

<i>Political Party/Coalition</i>	<i>Seats</i>
"For a Better Life"	42
Socialist People's Party	29
Liberal Alliance	5
Democratic Alliance of Albanians	1
Democratic Union of Albanians	1
Total	78

Within the coalition, the Democratic Party of Socialists took 30 seats, the People's Party seven seats and the Social Democratic Party five seats.

The shifting alliances make comparison with the 1996 results difficult. At that time, the Democratic Party of Socialists, which had won 45 seats, consisted of both the Djukanovic faction and the Bulatovic faction which is now the Socialist People's Party, while the People's Party, now in coalition with the Democratic Party of Socialists and the Social Democratic Party, was in a 1996 coalition with the Liberal Alliance which won 19 seats. The two Albanian parties each lost one seat in the 1998 elections, while the Party for Democratic Action, representing the Bosniac population, lost all three of its 1996 seats.

¹⁰ This percentage includes the 32,000 registered voters who could not, in fact, vote. Excluding them, turnout would have been over 80 percent.

The municipal races largely paralleled the Assembly results. The coalition won control of 14 of the 21 municipal councils, specifically those in Podgorica, Niksic, Cetinje, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Kotor, Herceg Novi, Tivat, Budva, Rozaje, Plav Danilovgrad and Savnik. The Socialist People's Party won in six—Pljevlja, Andrijevisa, Pluzine, Kolasin, Mojkovac and Zabljak—while Ulcinj was split between the two Albanian parties. Generally, Albanians tended to vote more for the coalition in the Assembly race and for one or the other Albanian parties in the local races. The Bosniacs, on the other hand, seemed clearly to favor the coalition for both.

CONCLUSION

The open opposition of Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic to the policies of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic created the possibility for the 1998 parliamentary elections in Montenegro to be the pretext for a new conflict within the former Yugoslavia. While many in the Serbian public would likely oppose, as would the Yugoslav military, using force against fellow Orthodox South Slavs, the fact that Montenegro could actually block Milosevic in assuming greater powers made this possibility very real. There was always a chance, especially as the campaign period became tense, that Belgrade would intervene even to prevent the elections from taking place, although it was much more likely that Milosevic would wait until flaws in the election process could be used as a pretext for some intervention. The relatively open conduct of the election and the decisive results for Djukanovic's coalition, however, deterred Belgrade from undertaking any such effort that may have been planned.

With Djukanovic and his supporters firmly in control in Podgorica, Milosevic has the strongest formal opposition yet to his power and policies. Having replaced Montenegro's 20 of the 40 deputies to the Yugoslav House of the Republics, Djukanovic effectively can veto Milosevic's attempts to pass legislation. To the extent that Milosevic therefore attempts to implement policies without consulting parliament, he faces Montenegrin non-compliance and the possibility that he will push the split to the point where Montenegro will seek actual independence.

Djukanovic, on the other hand, is well aware of the risks of breaking away, and he has instead become an advocate of bringing democracy to all of Yugoslavia—i.e., to Serbia—while defending Montenegro's sovereignty. He also must realize that, while his own political power has been enhanced by the 1998 elections, Bulatovic's followers are still a sizable political force. In addition, the parties with which he has formed a coalition, along with other opposition parties, will press him to continue to develop democratic institutions within Montenegro, and there are limits to how much international support he can receive.

Ultimately, however, the federation that currently exists will have a hard time surviving if the only two republics within it are antagonistic toward each other and moving in opposite political directions. Something will have to change. For the sake of peace and stability in the region, the international community has a strong interest in ensuring that Serbia begins to move along the same path which Montenegro has finally yet firmly decided to take as reflected in the 1998 parliamentary elections.