



SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN MONTENEGRO

October 18, 2002

On October 20, 2002, voters in Montenegro will cast their ballots in early parliamentary elections, as well as early municipal elections in the capital, Podgorica, and the seaside resort town of Tivat. Elections for president of the republic were also called this week for December 22.

Both the parliamentary and presidential elections are seen as critical for settling Montenegro's internal political course and resolving its contentious constitutional status with Serbia.

This report by NDI/Montenegro is the second in a series on the parliamentary elections. This issue focuses on the potential spoiler effect of small coalitions and the political party Code of Conduct regarding behavior during the campaign period in Montenegro. The campaign period ends on October 18. The elections will be held in 1,101 polling stations in 1,098 districts.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Long-term political stabilization and democratization in Montenegro has taken a back seat to an intense struggle for political power, following the March 14 Belgrade Agreement that ended prospects for Montenegro independence in the short-term in favor of loosely federated union with Serbia. The pro-independence, ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) failed to form a new government and lost control of the parliament after the Liberal Alliance (LSCG) joined Together for Yugoslavia in

an unlikely alliance of the staunchest pro-independence and pro-federation groups, united only in their shared desire to turn the DPS and President Milo Djukanovic out of power. The new LSCG-ZZJ majority passed amendments fundamentally altering the election law and rules for media coverage, precipitating a crisis that threatened to derail the parliamentary elections now scheduled for October 20.

POLLING SHOWS A TIGHT ELECTION

As was the case with the parliamentary elections in April 2001, the October parliamentary election is likely to be a tight race between the Democratic List for European Montenegro – Milo Djukanovic¹ and the Together for Changes (ZZP) coalition.² In April 2001, the DPS-SDP coalition gained 43% of the vote and the former ZZJ (now ZZP) 42%. The DPS-SDP was able to gain a parliamentary majority and form a government only with the participation of the Liberal Alliance in Montenegro (LSCG) and the ethnic Albanian parties.

Polling conducted in early September by the Podgorica-based Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) indicated that, if elections were held that month, the Democratic List would have won 30% of the

¹ Democratic List is a coalition of DPS and the smaller Social Democratic Party (SDP).

² Led by the Socialist People's Party (SNP), ZZP also includes the Serbian People's Party (SNS) and the People's Party (NS).

votes, ZPP 26% and LSCG 5%.³ The CEDEM poll also indicated that 18% of those polled would abstain from voting on October 20, while 13% were undecided as of September.

A key factor in determining the election results is likely to be turnout. In April 2001, the parliamentary election was seen by many as a referendum on independence and turnout was 82 percent. This year, however, Montenegro's independence is no longer an immediate issue and parties and voters are focusing more attention on economic and social problems. Many voters express disappointment with all of the parties and are unsure that any party has the will or a plan to overcome the economic crisis. On election day, it is possible that these voters will exhibit their disappointment by staying home. All parties are aware of the potential for low voter turnout and are focused on getting every one of their voters to the polling stations.

Both of the large coalitions (Democratic List or ZPP) are also very focused on getting a clear majority. However, it is unlikely that either will gain a parliamentary majority and form a stable government without a coalition with a smaller party or coalition of smaller parties.

As election day approaches, how the smaller parties and coalitions will fare becomes very important.

SMALL COALITIONS AS SPOILERS

Although LSCG has played a crucial balance-of-power role in parliament since April 2001, LSCG's decision to ally with ZZJ in parliament and at the local level may

³ The poll was in the field before the parties reached agreement on the legal framework for elections and well before the election campaign began.

affect its position with the electorate. In opinion polls, support for LSCG has fallen from a high of 10% earlier this year to 5%. While ZPP and LSCG could possibly form a parliamentary majority, there are other small coalitions that have the potential to cross the 3% threshold.

PATRIOTIC COALITION FOR YUGOSLAVIA

The Patriotic Coalition for Yugoslavia (PKJ) comprises the People's Socialist Party (NSS) of former Federal Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) of Vojislav Seselj and the Yugoslav Left (JUL) of Mirjana Markovic. The coalition remains closely allied with Slobodan Milosevic. Its campaign is targeted at ZPP voters who may be disappointed with the ZPP relationship and willingness to cooperate with the West. According to one PKJ leader, "ZPP has betrayed Yugoslavia by signing the Agreement brought by EU negotiator Javier Solana and rejecting the 1992 constitution."⁴

It should be noted that in April 2001, the NSS running alone was 248 votes short of crossing the threshold, while SRS and JUL received a total of 4,443 votes. Therefore, it is quite possible these parties could enter parliament by running in coalition.

BOSNIAK COALITION (BK)

BK comprises the Party for Democratic Action, Party of National Equality, Bosnian-Muslim Party, and the Independent Party for Democratic Action. Members of the coalition are pro-independence and likely to ally with Democratic List should they get into parliament. A similar coalition competed in the April 2001 elections only to pull out two days before elections. With its name on the ballot, the coalition received 4,045 votes. It is likely to take votes away

⁴ *Vijesti*, October 3, 2002. Mr. Solana is the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy.

from the Democratic List – and, in fact, DPS negotiated quite a bit with these parties to try to get them not to submit a list. However, the BK demanded two parliamentary seats from DPS so that they could form a separate parliamentary group, and the DPS refused.

PARTY CODE OF CONDUCT

The Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), a nonpartisan domestic election monitoring organization, has again produced a code of conduct regarding party behavior during the election campaign. Moreover, CDT was, for the first time, able to get all eight parliamentary parties to sign the Code. In signing the Code, several party leaders noted that the Code was a “significant step forward in the democratization process.” CDT codes of conduct were also done for 2001 parliamentary elections and recent municipal elections.

For the October 20 elections, CDT has incorporated a new monitoring mechanism into the Code: CDT convenes a weekly meeting of the signatory parties to discuss evidence of violations of the Code and to try to find a method to prevent further violations.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE

Since the first Code of Conduct in 2001, the parties and coalitions have improved compliance with the Code and, as a result, serious incidences of violence have been greatly reduced. Rather than emotional issues that raise tensions, economic issues have figured prominently in this campaign. However, the language used at rallies and in party statements continues to be extremely negative, with frequent declarations that the mafia, criminals, and thieves control the government, or that some parties are traitors

to the Montenegrin people.⁵ CDT noted in its October 10 monitoring statement that a “majority of Montenegrin politicians compete on how to insult their political opponents rather than on how to present their economic programs and find a way out of the difficult social crisis.”⁶

There have also been a number of other alleged violations:

- The Democratic List’s use of state resources in a political advertisement featuring a plane from the state-owned Montenegro Airlines and a stewardess;⁶
- LSCG barring some journalists from the daily paper *Vijesti* and TV IN and TV Pink from covering their public meetings;⁷ and
- Several provocations by DPS activists at ZZP rallies.⁸

In the last week, a ‘war of posters’ began to intensify. In many municipalities, every road sign has been completely covered with anonymous propaganda material that



An anonymous poster: “Watch your back – here come Slavko and Pedja.” The sign refers to Slavko Perovic, leader of the LSCG, and Predrag Bulatovic, leader of the SNP.

⁵ Section 1, para. A of the Code of Conduct. See the NDI website for the Code of Conduct (www.ndi.org).

⁶ Section 2.

⁷ Section 1, para. B.

⁸ Section 3.

contains nasty inferences about political opponents. CDT has pointed out to all parties that this recurring problem is a violation of the Code.

MEDIA MONITORING

A major complaint in all recent campaigns has been the bias of the state and private media. As noted in our last report, a parliamentary board for monitoring the media has been established. In its latest report on media monitoring, covering the period from August 31 until October 10, the Association of Young Journalists noted that in the campaign there has been “much more balanced reporting about politicians and political parties and much more criticism of the authorities than previous elections – which contributes to informing the citizens.”⁹

NDI IN MONTENEGRO

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI has supported the development of democratic institutions in Montenegro since 1997 in an effort to improve transparency, accountability, political representation, and citizen participation. Over the years, NDI has developed the organizational and outreach capabilities of democratically oriented political parties and provided technical assistance to several civic groups engaged in reforming the political process.

As a result of NDI's efforts, parties have begun to strengthen their organizational structures and to communicate directly with voters. NDI's 2001/2002 polling project - consisting of eight public opinion surveys between March 2001 and April 2002 provided the parties with information necessary for crafting messages responsive to their voters' concerns.

In 2002, NDI began to engage parliament and work with its institutions and individuals to improve efficient functioning of this fundamental democratic institution. With funding from the Dutch government, NDI provided computers to the Assembly and established an Internet/Press center, is training staff and MPs to use the computers and is working to rebuild the parliamentary website.

In advance of the elections, NDI has provided technical and financial assistance to the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), a nonpartisan domestic monitoring organization, on monitoring a party Code of Conduct for the campaign and election-day observation.

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

In Central and Eastern Europe, NDI conducts programs in Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. For more information on NDI's Montenegro programs, please contact William Hayden in Washington, D.C., at 202-728-5662, or NDI in Podgorica (Lisa McLean or Marianne Goodwin) at 381-81-623-132.

⁹ The full report is available at www.amnecg.com.