

# PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN MONTENEGRO

December 6, 2002



*On December 22, 2002, voters in Montenegro will cast their ballots in presidential elections. These elections and the extraordinary parliamentary elections held on October 20 are seen as critical for stabilizing the political scene in Montenegro in order for long-awaited economic and political reforms to proceed apace and the new state union with Serbia to begin the European Union's accession process.*

*This report by NDI/Montenegro is the fourth in a series on the elections.<sup>1</sup> This issue focuses on the legal framework and the candidates for presidential elections as the campaign period begins.*

<sup>1</sup> Previous reports are available at NDI's website, [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

## POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Long-term political stabilization and democratization in Montenegro took a back seat to an intense struggle for political power, following the March 14 Belgrade Agreement that ended prospects for Montenegrin independence in the short-term in favor of a loosely federated union with Serbia. The pro-independence, ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) lost control of the parliament after Liberal Alliance (LSCG) withdrew its support for the DPS-led government and joined the opposition forcing early parliamentary elections on October 20, 2002.

The parliamentary elections resulted in the Democratic List for European Montenegro – Milo Djukanovic<sup>2</sup> gaining 39 of 75 seats for a majority in parliament and a mandate to form a new government. The opposition Together for Changes (ZZP) coalition<sup>3</sup> won 30 seats, while the Liberal Alliance and Democratic Coalition “Albanians Together” won 4 and 2 seats, respectively.

In early November, in a surprise move, the DPS Main Board decided to nominate President Milo Djukanovic to be the future prime minister. Thus, the outgoing prime minister, Filip Vujanovic, was elected speaker of parliament in mid-November.

<sup>2</sup> Democratic List is a coalition of Djukanovic's DPS and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), as well as the smaller Citizen's Party and People's Unity.

<sup>3</sup> Together for Changes is composed of the Socialist People's Party (SNP), Serbian People's Party (SNS) and People's Party (NS).

On November 25, President Djukanovic resigned his position as president and, pursuant to Article 90 of the constitution, Speaker Vujanovic assumed the duties of interim president until a new president is elected on or after December 22. The following day, Vujanovic named Djukanovic as prime minister-designate who now has 60 days to form a government. Djukanovic is discussing the composition of the new government with junior coalition partner SDP, and it is anticipated that he will present his government to parliament for approval during the week of December 9.

### **PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION LAW**

The law governing presidential elections in Montenegro is similar to Serbia's – although not identical.

Article 16 of the law stipulates that, if turnout in the elections is less than half of the registered voters, voting is *repeated*. If, in the repeated elections, less than half of registered voters again fail to participate “the entire election procedure shall be reopened.”

Article 17 states that the candidate with the most votes – provided that it is at least 50 percent of the vote – shall be elected.

Therefore, if 50 percent of registered voters go to the polls and one of the candidates gets at least 50 percent of the vote, a president will be elected on December 22.

However, if turnout is less than 50 percent, the election with all 11 registered candidates (see below) will be held again. The date of that repeated election is expected by many to be January 19 or 26 – after the Orthodox holiday season.

Pursuant to Article 18, if there is 50 percent turnout on December 22 but no candidate succeeds to gain 50 percent of the votes cast, a second round of elections will be held on January 5 (i.e., within 14 days of the first round). In this run-off election, the two candidates with the most votes in the first round would appear on the ballot and the candidate that received the most votes in this second round would win. In this scenario, there is no turnout requirement.

### **CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT**

The deadline to submit candidacies for president closed at midnight on December 2. The Republican Election Commission (RIK) confirmed 11 candidates who will appear on the ballot in the following order:

1. Obrad Markovic (Yugoslav Communists)
2. Milan-Milo Radulovic (Natural Law Party)
3. Dragan Hajdukovic (Independent)
4. Filip Vujanovic (DPS-SDP)
5. Milan Sparovic (Independent)
6. Milivoje Bakic (Independent)
7. Ilija Darmanovic (SRS)<sup>4</sup>
8. Mihailo-Milo Markovic (Independent)
9. Jovan Pejovic (Independent)
10. Aleksandar Vasiljevic (SRS-VS)<sup>5</sup>
11. Djordjije Milic (Independent)

While candidates needed to gather 2,000 signatures to register, few of the confirmed candidates are expected to garner more than 2,000 votes on election day. The exceptions are:

- (1) *Filip Vujanovic*, currently Speaker of the parliament and vice president of the DPS, who has served as prime minister since 1998;
- (2) *Aleksandar Vasiljevic*, a 26-year-old owner of a detective firm in the northern

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<sup>4</sup> Serbian Radical Party not associated with V. Seselj.

<sup>5</sup> Serbian Radical Party – dr. Vojislav Seselj.

town of Berane (In coalition with Momir Bulatovic's People's Socialist Party, his party – SRS-VS – got 9,911 votes in the October parliamentary elections.);

(3) *Dragan Hajdukovic*, a Ph.D in physics from Cetinje who authored the idea of proclaiming Montenegro “the Ecological State” (Hajdukovic has competed in presidential elections since 1992 – receiving 10,270 votes in 1992 and 1,999 votes in 1997).

After much suspense, the Socialist People's Party (SNP), the senior party in the opposition Together for Changes (ZZP) coalition, decided on December 1 not to field a candidate in these elections – saying that “there are no elementary conditions for fair and democratic elections.”<sup>6</sup> SNP leader Predrag Bulatovic had taken himself out of the race after Vujanovic's candidacy was announced. Bulatovic declared that he had “no intention of standing in the presidential race with someone lower than Djukanovic.”<sup>7</sup>

Having advocated that the ZZP candidate be Miodrag Lekic, Yugoslav ambassador to Italy, the Serbian People's Party (SNS), expressed its disappointment at SNP's decision. People's Party, on the other hand, seems satisfied with SNP's decision.

### **POTENTIAL BOYCOTT**

As of this writing, it is unclear whether SNP and its coalition partners will call on their voters to boycott the election. SNS says that it can hardly call for a boycott in Montenegro after appealing to Serbian voters to participate in presidential elections.<sup>8</sup> In the last week, SNP has issued contradictory statements about whether its voters should participate or not. One leader

explained that the SNP decision was not “to boycott but only not to have a candidate and not to support any other candidate.”<sup>9</sup>

Almost immediately after the October parliamentary elections, Liberal Alliance (LS) made it clear that they would not field a candidate or support any other candidate. Party leaders say that they will not vote because the election is meaningless. Nevertheless, they say their voters can do what they want to do.

### **THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS**

Although Vujanovic has begun an intensive round of visits to all the municipalities, the campaign is expected to be fairly low-key. None of the other candidates have the resources to travel throughout Montenegro and organize large rallies.

Furthermore, two issues are attracting much more media attention in Montenegro, pushing the presidential election into the background. First, Serbia and Montenegro are on the verge of concluding a Constitutional Charter for the Union of Serbia and Montenegro that should go to the republic parliaments for adoption by the end of the year. Only a few emotional points continue to be the subject of intense debate by members of the Constitutional Commission and the media.

Second, on December 1, the deputy public prosecutor was arrested for involvement in human trafficking and slavery based on the testimony of a Moldovan woman who managed to escape from captivity and to make it to a women's shelter. Revelations about this case and suggestions that other high-level people may be implicated dominate the headlines and almost all coffee-shop conversations. It remains to be

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<sup>6</sup> *Montenegro Daily*, 990, December 2, 2002

<sup>7</sup> *Montenegro Daily*, 987, November 28, 2002

<sup>8</sup> *Montenegro Daily*, 990, December 2, 2002

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<sup>9</sup> *Montenegro Daily*, 990, December 2, 2002

seen if this hot topic will have an impact on the overall political campaign.

## CONCLUSION

It is not entirely clear why SNP did not put up a candidate. Given the October election results, there was little likelihood that the opposition could find a candidate that could defeat the DPS candidate. Therefore, many in the opposition saw no reason to put a lot of effort into the election. Others in the opposition, however, argued that SNP needed a candidate to demonstrate that it was the most serious opposition party.

At this point, it will be difficult for DPS to get 50 percent turnout in the first round – although Vujanovic would easily gain 50 percent of the votes cast. Based on the recently updated voter's register, 228,474 voters need to go to the polls on December 22 for the election to succeed. From an optimistic point of view, the competing candidates could entice as many as 190,000 voters to go to the polls. But that leaves another 38,000 opposition voters that need to go to the polls – and, since they do not have a candidate to vote for, it is questionable whether they will bother.

Nevertheless, on December 4, Vujanovic stated that he believed that there would be sufficient turnout will take place to make the first round successful, since “no party in Montenegro, especially one that cares about the opinion of the international community, will boycott the election regardless of whether it has its candidate or not.”<sup>10</sup>

## 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 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.

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<sup>10</sup> *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, no. 2429, December 5, 2002

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.